Building a bigger us: How to talk about homes and immigration

A research briefing

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Introduction

To build a society in which everyone can thrive, we need to make sure everyone has a decent and affordable home. This means changes like building more social homes, reforming private renting, and improving the quality of homes.

FrameWorks UK have been working together with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Nationwide Foundation, as part of the Talking about Homes project, to change the conversation about homes in the UK and build support for such changes. Our research reports and toolkits provide evidence-based ways to build this support – informed by robust research involving more than 7,000 people from across the UK[1]. This work has also been shaped by the needs of organisations working across the UK housing sector.

During 2024, many communicators in the housing sector – from people working in campaigning and advocacy organisations to people working in housing provision, such as local government, housing associations and local authorities – identified an increase in discourse linking immigration to pressure on the UK's housing system. They reported that this was distracting attention from their calls to improve housing. These challenges were raised repeatedly during Talking about Homes workshops and webinars, and were identified as part of evaluation work carried out by the project learning partner, DHA Communications[2].

Problems in our housing system have built up over decades, through lack of investment and government inaction. This includes a lack of investment in building genuinely affordable social homes, and the growth of – and reliance on – private developers and the private rented sector. When the conversation becomes focused on immigration, it can divert us from the wider conversation the housing sector wants and needs to have about the root causes of the housing crisis – and the systemic changes that would help to increase the availability of decent and affordable homes.

In this context, in 2025, FrameWorks UK undertook original qualitative research, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Nationwide Foundation and Shelter, to develop the evidence base on how to win hearts and minds for changes to the housing system. In particular, this research was designed to explore how the public think about homes and immigration – and how communicators who are pushing for more decent and affordable homes can best meet these communications challenges and focus the conversation on improving our housing system.

Recommendations in brief

1. **Emphasise the collective benefits of decent, affordable homes for everyone**
   People recognise that when all of us live in decent affordable homes, this contributes to a thriving, prosperous society. Talking about how the shared foundation of home benefits us all helps direct thinking towards the need to build more homes – and away from reducing demand.

2. **Make building communities part of the story**
   People are concerned not only about a lack of decent, affordable homes, but also pressures on services such as GPs and roads. Communicators need to tell a joined-up story – about not only building more homes, but the wider infrastructure that it takes to make thriving communities.

3. **Show that our housing system can be improved**
   We need to build the understanding and belief that – with the right solutions and resources – our housing system can be improved. Focusing on what is possible helps to orientate the conversation towards how we can improve our housing system for everyone.

4. **Focus on responsibility and accountability, not blame**
   Building understanding of what has led to a shortage of decent, affordable homes, and who is responsible for improvements helps direct attention towards how our housing system can be improved – and why we still need more affordable homes to be built. Most importantly, we need to spell out who can change things for the better.

Methodology[3]

This brief builds on previous mixed method research conducted by FrameWorks on how to talk about housing in the UK. This included in-depth cognitive interviews, focus groups and a series of large scale, nationally representative surveys. In total, research involved 7,069 members of the public, plus an advisory group representing 15 organisations from across the housing sector. The research was carried out across 2020-22, and subsequent work to share insights with the housing sector has been carried out for over three years to date. See the Further Reading section.

This existing body of research provided a foundation for further qualitative research to investigate i) how people understand housing in the context of immigration and ii) how communications could support conversations that shine a light on how our housing system can be improved, and build public understanding and support for solutions.

In 2025, FrameWorks researchers carried out in-depth cognitive interviews with a broadly representative sample of the population (n. 20). We analysed the responses to identify the mindsets that shape how people think about the issues of homes and immigration.

We then carried out Peer Discourse Sessions with a broadly representative sample of the public (n. 36). Peer Discourse Sessions are a form of focus group designed to explore how people think about issues, and how framing shapes public thinking.

These sessions included a variety of discussion prompts and activities to evaluate how different frames were taken up in social context – how easily people understood them, recalled them, and used them in conversations with each other. Activities are designed to evaluate how different frames shifted both thinking and conversation (that is, they are about the efficacy of the frames, not participants' preferences).

A session was then held with communicators working on housing and immigration issues. In this session, emerging findings and recommendations were presented, and then refined to ensure our final recommendations were as useful and usable as possible.

How framing and mindsets research can help

Framing is the choices we make about what ideas we share and how we share them. This includes what we choose to emphasise, how we explain things and what we leave unsaid. Framing can help us unlock new ways of thinking about social issues.

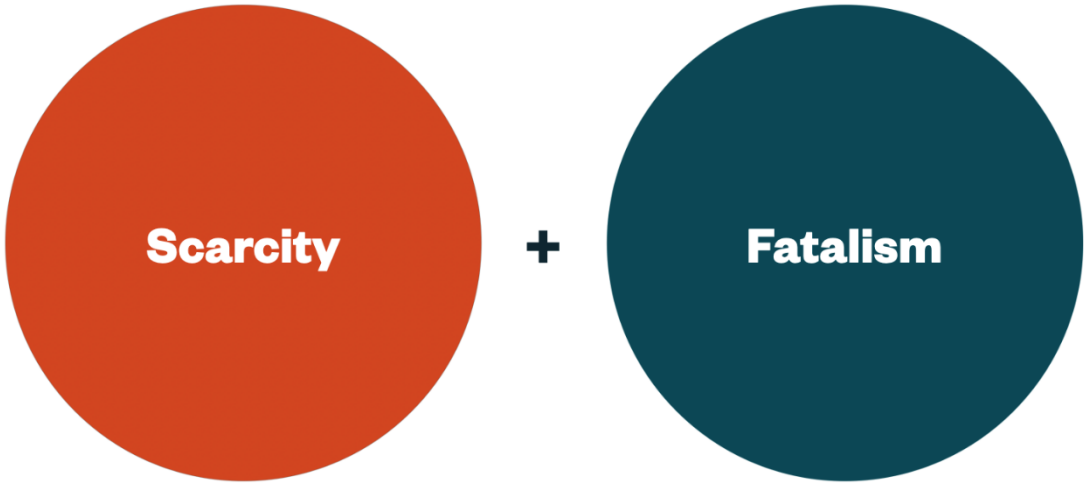
FrameWorks' research reveals how people understand social issues – the cultural mindsets or 'mental shortcuts' which guide their thinking. Mindsets are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we see the world and how we act within it. They are shared across a population – and activated by what we see and hear.

Mindsets research explores these deep, underlying patterns of thinking that shape and explain patterns in public opinion. Whereas public opinion research examines *what* people think today, mindsets research examines *how* people think – and so where their thinking could go.

How people think about homes and immigration

We need to first understand the mindsets that shape people's thinking on homes and immigration. This allows us to identify which mindsets could helpfully be brought to the fore using framing, and which mindsets to background.

Our research showed how two mindsets dominate public thinking: ***scarcity*** and ***fatalism***.



Scarcity

Scarcity is the assumption that there are not enough resources to meet demand: that our public systems are over-burdened and under pressure; and, when it comes to housing, there are not enough homes for those of us who need them.

> *"When they're building new houses, we've not got the infrastructure for the amount of people that we've got... there's only so many people that you can have driving on the road, or in the hospitals, or at schools and things. Everything's oversubscribed."*

More specifically, people assume there are not enough *affordable* homes to meet demand. Across our interviews and focus groups, participants acknowledged that in many areas there were plenty of homes, and more being built, but that these were not the *right* homes – in that they were not affordable for the people who need them.

This mindset is a particular challenge for communicators: it does not account for *how* housing scarcity happens, and who is responsible for it. When asked about housing problems, for example, participants drawing on a ***scarcity*** mindset assumed a fixed and finite supply of affordable homes – and so directed their attention to increased demand as the problem.

A ***scarcity*** mindset can lead to zero-sum thinking in which additional demand is seen to be at others' expense.

"Where I live, [social housing is]being built exclusively for migrants, and this is at the expense of some... who have been on the housing list for some years. But it's being prioritised in favour of incomers."

Fatalism

Fatalism is the assumption that problems with our housing system are too big and too complex to solve: ultimately, there will never be enough decent, affordable housing for everyone – or certainly not in our own lifetime.

"I don't think there will ever be enough housing for everyone who needs it in the UK."

Fatalism normalises the idea that taking action is pointless: drawing on a ***fatalism*** mindset, people reason that either no solutions to the UK's housing problems exist, or no solutions exist that could make a meaningful difference.

Like ***scarcity***, ***fatalism*** is a particular challenge for communicators. Reasoning with this mindset makes it easier for people to dismiss policies to increase the supply of decent and affordable homes as unworkable or as action that won't be followed through. And it directs attention away from what could be done within the housing system – and instead, towards lessening demand.

Scarcity **and** ***fatalism*** **are often used in combination with other mindsets to shape how people respond to discussion about homes and immigration.**

Scarcity + Reciprocity

Reciprocity is the assumption that society should be based on give and take: we can take from society because we contribute to it. In this way of thinking, our right to housing provision is then based on our contributions to society.

When people are reasoning using both a ***scarcity*** and ***reciprocity*** mindset, they reason that if there are fewer resources to go around, it is less acceptable to take – and unacceptable to take more than is given. And, when it comes to immigration, most people in our research believed that immigrants take more than they give.

"If you make a positive impact towards society, or you're at least paying your tax and national insurance to support the system that has allowed you to come over here and get

those benefits, then that's fine. But if you're not really contributing anything back, ***which I rarely see****, then it's quite challenging."*

It is notable that, across our research, the distinction between 'legal' vs 'illegal' migration was often used as a way of distinguishing immigrants who would contribute (legal) versus immigrants who would take (illegal).

In either case, people's conception of contribution is about working and paying taxes. The things that facilitate this contribution – such as the foundation of a secure home or the right to work – are not part of the picture.

Scarcity + Economic naturalism

Economic naturalism is the assumption that our economy and the housing market are shaped by forces outside of and beyond human control; there is an 'invisible hand' that dictates the supply and demand of the market.

Drawing on this mindset, people reason that, when the demand for housing exceeds supply, availability goes down and prices go up; and that when demand is increased by more people entering the country, our housing situation will unfortunately, but inevitably, worsen.

Crucially, this story of supply and demand is applied to housing in limited ways – and often combined with an assumption of supply-side ***scarcity***. Across our research, people focused on external demands (like immigration and social mobility) affecting housing availability and prices, but not so much on how policy change could improve availability and reduce prices.

"Supply, demand, changing demographics, how society is changing... younger people want to get onto the property ladder... Obviously, there is more and more immigration happening in the UK. And this creates a need."

Scarcity + Britain first

Britain first is the assumption that national resources belong first and foremost to citizens – and our government should prioritise the immediate needs of British citizens over others. Drawing on this mindset, people reason that rights and resources should be based on nationality, not need.

When this mindset is active, it is more difficult to have a broader conversation about improving the supply of homes because attention is on *who* should be eligible for housing provision. When combined with the ***scarcity*** mindset, it follows that, given limited resources, any housing made available to immigrants is at the expense of British citizens.

"[Immigrants are] prioritised over British nationals for social housing placements... I think it's wrong."

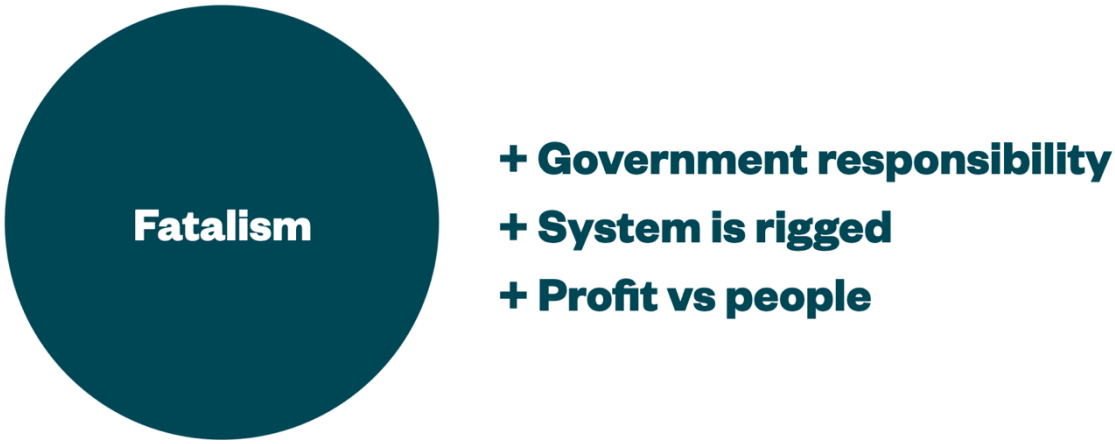
Scarcity + Shared needs

Shared needs is the assumption that every person, regardless of nationality, has shared needs, such as shelter, that should be met. Both British citizens *and* immigrants share these needs, and face challenges which mean these needs are not always met.

When combined with the ***scarcity*** mindset, people reason that, with limited resources and strained public services, it is simply not possible to meet everyone's needs.

If communicators don't talk about how ***scarcity*** can be addressed, people see exclusionary policies as an unfortunate but necessary response to limited resources.

> *"We're all struggling, and we haven't got enough houses... in an ideal world, we would be able to welcome [immigrants] and say, here's a bit of money, off you go, try and make a life... [but] everyone's struggling."*



Fatalism + Government responsibility

Government responsibility is the assumption that the government is ultimately responsible for meeting certain needs, such as ensuring there is enough housing. Government here is seen as both local and national:

> *"Ultimately it's the government's responsibility to make sure that people have somewhere to live. Or the local authority, or just the general term of the government."*

This mindset has mixed implications for communicators. Strengthening people's belief in our government's responsibility to resolve housing challenges for everyone in the UK is vital work. However, this mindset is frequently combined with ***fatalism***. Across our interviews and focus groups, participants considered government to be responsible for improving both housing and immigration in theory – but unable to in practice.

> *"Government is rubbish in this country... They haven't got a clue, they don't do anything."*

Fatalism + System is rigged

System is rigged is the assumption that systems are rigged to benefit some people, such as immigrants, and disadvantage others, such as UK citizens. The housing system in particular is seen to make it easy for 'unworthy' immigrants to take – and even to exploit – to the detriment of people already living here.

> *"Illegal immigrants... are prioritised over people within the council system who require social housing...[The system means] they **have** to prioritise illegal immigrants to a certain degree over people of British nationality."*

There is, however, little detail in people's thinking on *how* the system is rigged – and so how it could be improved – which leaves space for ***fatalism***.

Fatalism + Profit versus people

Profit versus people is the assumption that our economic and social system are designed to motivate and reward action through profit. Profit is seen to be prioritised in housing development at the expense of people and communities.

Significantly, across interviews and focus groups, ***profit versus people*** was used to criticise the pursuit of profit at communities' expense:

> *"**Money is the motivator.** Most developments, they have to bring something to the community, a play area for children or road infrastructure... [but that's often] abandoned... They built their houses, and this thing that they promised the community is just not happening."*

This prioritisation of profit before people's collective benefit was the most frequently articulated reasoning for why more affordable and adequate housing is not being built.

This mindset is then a clear opening for communicators: it places limits on the acceptable pursuit of profit, and makes space for people to think about housing as more than just a commodity[4]. It drives people's attention towards the systemic changes that are needed – beyond immigration – to ensure quality, affordable housing and well-resourced communities.

The challenge is to overcome the ***fatalism*** that often accompanies this mindset.

Communications recommendations

1. Emphasise the collective benefits of decent, affordable homes for everyone

What to do

- Start with what we **all** have to gain, before talking about benefits to individuals or specific groups.
- Position housing as a shared need – and use collective language like 'everyone' and 'all of us'.
- Set out how, when we have the solid foundation of a home, we're more able to contribute to society and take part in our communities.

Why

People recognise that when all of us live in decent affordable homes, this contributes to a more thriving and prosperous society.

Talking about housing as something that people need in order to contribute to a community and wider society can helpfully expand the ***reciprocity*** mindset. Rather than focusing on contributing first, it makes space for thinking about what people need *in order to* contribute in the first place – like the foundation of a home.

This focusses us on the collective benefits of decent, affordable homes, rather than ***scarcity*** – and the fatalistic, zero-sum thinking that often follows. In our research, participants primed with this idea focused more on how things can and should be, rather than focusing on problems and expressing fatalistic ideas about how things will never change for the better.

Scarcity can trigger a moral triage of who deserves housing support, with newcomers – especially those considered 'different' – seen as least deserving. Focusing instead on a shared need – the solid foundation of a home – highlights what we have in common, rather than any points of difference. Emphasising the shared benefits of this need being met helps us to direct people's attention towards increasing the supply of affordable homes – instead of reducing demand as the default response to scarcity.

It is notable that in our research a collective benefits frame sparked the most productive discussions amongst participants about how to find common ground and de-escalate conversations about housing and immigration[5] without being dismissive of people's worries or triggering defensiveness. This was especially evident in participants who had previously expressed anti-immigrant sentiment.

> *"It benefits everybody to build new homes. When people have their own home, they're happier and healthier. And, you know, happy to integrate within the community. It*

benefits everyone in the community when new homes are built. It made me look at the bigger picture, really."

The language used in these discussions was inclusive, and participants' responses indicated that they saw immigrants not as outsiders, but as members of the community.

Example

Instead of...	"We need to build more affordable homes to support people who are struggling the most. Not having the solid foundation of a home harms people's health, makes it harder to work, and makes people isolated."
Try...	"Building more affordable homes benefits all of us. When we have the solid foundation of a home, we're more likely to be healthy, have jobs, and take part in our communities."
Why?	The first example risks triggering an assessment of who would be the most deserving of support when resources (homes) are scarce. By focusing on the collective benefits to us all – what we all have to gain – the second example sidesteps ***scarcity*** and creates a bigger 'us'.

Watch out: Don't lean on prototypes such as 'The Immigrant Doctor'

"A lot of people who have come into the country legally do have a very positive impact on society, like doctors."

A common way of pushing back on anti-immigrant rhetoric is to highlight immigrants who are hard-working or contributing to the economy. Indeed, participants in every interview invoked 'the immigrant doctor' prototype: an 'ideal' immigrant who would help British citizens in their most vulnerable and dependent state, rather than be vulnerable and dependent themselves. They are a net 'giver' rather than a 'taker', and therefore deemed to deserve to live in the UK.

This praise for how important immigrants are for the UK sets the threshold for contribution so high that it becomes extremely difficult to meet – with other immigrants seen to fall short.

Use of 'the immigrant doctor' prototype should be avoided by communicators as it may well backfire.

2. Make building communities part of the story

What to do

- Make communities part of the story. Tap into the understanding that a decent home is about more than the building we live in.
- Combine calls for more housing with calls for more community infrastructure – like doctors, dentists, public transport, and schools.
- Paint a picture of what is possible and how communities can and must have a meaningful role in getting there.

Why

People's concerns around a lack of affordable housing go hand in hand with worries about already stretched services, such as GPs and congested roads. Communications on housing need to address concerns about wider infrastructure within communities too.

> *"You've got to build communities, not just houses."*

Communicators have an opportunity to tell a joined-up story – about not only building more homes, but the wider infrastructure that it takes to make a home and maintain thriving communities. Calls for more housing which do not acknowledge this, risk triggering ***scarcity*** and concerns over too high a demand on local infrastructure.

When asked to consider different ways they could make the case for building more social homes in a particular area, participants primed with the role communities could play displayed more 'can-do' thinking. They reasoned that this problem could be solved by meaningfully involving communities in such developments, as they would be motivated to get it right for everyone involved.

This focus on communities, combined with a solution and vision for the future led to more conversation about what was possible – it reduced ***fatalism***.

> *"It's not just houses that you have to take into consideration, is it? It's the doctors and the schools, etc. You've got to take all of that... to build a community. You can't just leave all that to the government. Everyone's got to play their part."*

Importantly, this community focus did not displace ***government responsibility***: communities were not seen as a replacement for government action, but as a much-needed complement to it. Participants identified the need for government to fund, lead and enable changes such as ensuring more social homes are built. And, when prompted to think about the role of communities, participants recognised that the current housing crisis is a significant, multi-faceted challenge to be solved and it follows that there are many actors needed to fix it.

Talking about housing problems, such as the lack of social homes, as a problem that we – our communities – can play a part in fixing, helps to avoid triggering thinking about government ineffectiveness. While the responsibility belongs to government, fixing the problem is shared,

and therefore more likely to be achieved – and in ways that take into account what communities want and need.

Examples

An example of how to weave in the role of communities, and paint a picture of what's possible:

- "It's possible for everyone to live in a decent, affordable home, but we need to work together to get there. Communities across the UK can play a part in calling for more social homes, and our government should ensure developers take on board what communities need to thrive."

Instead of...	"We need to build more social housing."
Try...	"We need to build more social homes. But to build thriving communities, we need to make sure that essential infrastructure like transport and GP surgeries are considered alongside the homes we need."
Why?	Combining calls for more housing with calls for more infrastructure will help to allay people's concerns that their communities cannot support more people.

Watch out: Triggering 'Us vs Them'

When talking about the role of communities in the context of housing, efforts should be made to do so in such a way that doesn't inadvertently create a sense of 'Us vs Them' – where some people are considered part of the community in question, and others are not.

Take opportunities across media to paint a varied picture of what community is, and use inclusive language such as 'all of us', 'everyone in <location>', and so on.

3. Show that our housing system can be improved

What to do

- Start with solutions – focus first on what *is* working, and how things could work better, before talking about what isn't.
- Break down problems and solutions into clear steps and use concrete examples – and make sure solutions match the scale of the challenges we face.
- Emphasise that our government *can* and *should* act to improve our housing system. Give examples of where progress has been made, as well as where there is more work to be done.

Why

When faced with the housing crisis, the size and complexity of the challenge at hand can rapidly lead to ***fatalism***. It is notable that, across our research, even participants who shared solutions were quick to name blockers which would get in the way.

To counter ***fatalism***, we need to build the understanding and belief that our housing system can be improved with the right solutions and resources. In particular, communications need to build the belief that it is possible to increase the *supply* of decent homes in the UK – redirecting the conversation away from simply reducing demand. Participants primed with a vision for the future were less likely to default to ***fatalism*** – and instead focused their discussion on what solutions were possible.

Communications must not only talk about the end goal of how our housing system could be better, but also the steps we can take to get there – and how to overcome challenges along the way. Breaking down those challenges into clear steps, and explaining how they can be addressed through concrete action builds people's sense of efficacy – the belief that problems can and will be solved.

There is a need, also, to build people' sense of *government* efficacy. Any attribution of responsibility to the government is at best unhelpful, and at worst actively harmful, if what follows is the assumption 'so therefore nothing will change', as we see when people draw on the ***government responsibility*** and ***fatalism*** mindsets in combination. Communications need to emphasise how our government *can* and *should* act, to highlight where positive steps have been taken already, and how these can be built upon.

> *"Solutions. Not looking back. We've got to find ways to put things back together."*

Building a sense of government efficacy helps to counter ***fatalism***. Highlighting government actions that are helping to improve housing – such as the introduction of the Renters' Rights Act or the Affordable Homes Programme, and the real-world difference these changes make to people's lives – is one way to build this sense of government efficacy.

Given the dominance of the ***fatalism*** mindset, it will be important to build a sense of efficacy early on in communications – before ***fatalism*** can shape people's understanding of what follows.

Examples

Instead of...	"For decades, successive governments have failed to build enough social homes. It's about time that changed, so the government's promised boost to the Social and Affordable Homes Programme is welcome."
Try...	"The government's boost to the Social and Affordable Homes Programme will mean more homes – including much-needed social homes – will be built over the next ten years."
Why?	While the first example leads with government inaction, the second example leads with government action, a solution, and what it means. Given how dominant ***fatalism*** is, we need to emphasise that government can act, what can change, and what is changing.

Instead of...	"The housing crisis is a complex and multi-faceted problem. Change is possible, but it will take time."
Try...	"There are many solutions to the housing crisis. And progress is happening right now. For example, the recent introduction of the Renters' Rights Act will offer more protections to people renting."
Why?	The second example starts to break down the housing crisis from a big, complex problem which feels insolvable, to one which can be tackled piece by piece with proportionate solutions that match the scale of the challenge. This helps to build the sense that change is possible, and can start happening now.

4. Focus on responsibility and accountability, not blame

What to do

- Establish responsibility and accountability by explaining how problems have come about, building up over decades in our housing system.
- Highlight:
  - examples of how parts of our housing system are set up to make profit
  - how this is often to the detriment of collective benefits to communities
  - how this could be changed through increased government regulation with the aim of rebalancing the system.
- Paint a picture of what is possible and how communities can and must have a meaningful role in getting there.

Why

Building understanding of what has led to a shortage of decent, affordable homes, and who is responsible, helps to counter ***economic naturalism*** – and the assumption that supply-side ***scarcity*** is just 'how things are.'

Participants primed with the idea that the UK's shortage of affordable homes was not a new problem, but in fact decades in the making, had more nuanced discussion about the different factors that contributed to this shortage – and who was responsible. It put more recent focus on immigration into perspective – a sticky idea that many participants returned to over the course of group discussion. Better still, acknowledgement of how problems have come about should be paired with how we can fix them, to avoid triggering ***fatalism*** (as per recommendation 3).

Tapping into ***profit versus people*** can also shine a light on one of the reasons why more decent and affordable homes aren't being built in the first place. But this mindset needs to be activated in the right way.

Leaning solely on criticism of 'greedy' individuals, developers or construction companies who are motivated by profit may be met with agreement, but does not make space for thinking about what could be done about it. It risks triggering the assumption that some people are simply greedy by nature.

Tapping into ***profit versus people*** while telling a *systemic* story instead primes thinking about how inequality in our housing system has been allowed to happen – the design flaws that are exploited – and how the system could be redesigned to benefit our whole society. Communicators can give examples of how certain aspects of our housing system put profit before people, how this is often to the detriment of communities, and how this could be put right.

> *"There's plenty of options, really, when you think about it. It's just, ultimately, greed is what's holding it back."*

Unsurprisingly, most of us are unclear about how things like housing allocation policy works and this fuels distrust and resignation that things will not change. But when communicators show how different processes work (or fail to work), it makes possible a conversation about how a system could work better, and who is responsible for making these changes.

While participants expressed the need for responsibility and accountability in order for us to move forward and fix housing problems, many rejected the idea of apportioning 'blame'. For example, while participants agreed that policies such as the Right to Buy had contributed to a lack of social homes, they were uncomfortable with any implication that people who had bought their home via this scheme could be blamed. And while participants considered the government responsible for fixing housing problems, they expressed frustration towards discourse which solely blamed government without also presenting a way forward to fix these problems. This was particularly true for participants who identified as Conservative or Reform voters.

> *"It takes you away from the blame game and more to this is what we're going to do."*

Example

An example that taps into the *profit versus people* mindset:

- "Let's take action to stop developers from putting profit over people. Our government can put rules in place to hold developers to account – to ensure more genuinely affordable homes are built, and that communities have what they need."

Instead of...	"We are facing a housing emergency. The Right to Buy scheme, through which many social homes were bought by tenants and never replaced, simply kicked the problem down the road. Now we're having to deal with it."
Try...	"The Right to Buy scheme, which allowed many social homes to be sold without replacement, is just one of many factors that has led to a shortage of decent affordable homes."
Why?	While it can be helpful to spell out how problems have come about, the first example may be read as an overstatement of just one factor that has led to current housing shortages – or even seen to blame people who bought their social homes. The second example makes it clearer that this is just one of many factors.

Watch out: 'Red tape' vs regulation

The idea of government regulation – to ensure greater fairness in the housing system and prevent it from being exploited by 'greedy' individuals was welcomed by participants. This was the case even when 'red tape' had previously been cited as a blocker to building more affordable homes.

In order for regulation to be seen in a positive light, rather than dismissed as unwanted 'red tape' it will be important to build the understanding of what regulation is *for*. Communications should make sure to explain what problems are being addressed by regulation – and how it will help communities.

Conclusion

Our research reveals two mindsets dominate how people think about homes and immigration: ***scarcity*** and ***fatalism***. These are often used in combination with other mindsets to shape how people think, feel and act.

These mindsets can lead to a disproportionate focus on the demand that immigration places on our housing system and wider infrastructure – and risk obscuring the solutions which could increase the supply of homes, improve our housing system, and ensure more people have the foundation of a decent, affordable home.

Communicators can navigate these mindsets, and rebalance the conversation using the framing strategies set out in this brief:

1. Emphasise the collective benefits of decent, affordable homes for everyone
2. Make building communities part of the story
3. Show that our housing system can be improved
4. Focus on responsibility and accountability, not blame

More examples and guidance for applying the communications recommendations can be found in the toolkit[6] that accompanies this brief.

The mindsets which underpin how we think about homes and immigration point to a need to tell a new story – across audiences. We need to build the belief that our housing problems can be solved – and that change can happen within the housing system itself.

Further reading

Research briefings

- Communicating about housing in the UK: Obstacles, openings and emerging recommendations, 2021
- Moving from concern to concrete change: how to build support for more social housing, 2021
- Talking about homes: The foundation for a decent life, 2022
- Talking about homes: what we can learn from homelessness and poverty research, 2023

Toolkits

- How to talk about homes, 2023
- How to grow support for social homes, 2024
- How to talk about private renting, 2024
- Building consensus for building homes, 2025
- How to talk about supported housing, 2025
- How to talk about homes and immigration, 2026

Endnotes

[1] FrameWorks, 2021, *Moving from concern to concrete change: how to build support for more social housing*
Miller, T; L'Hôte, E; Rochman, A; O'Shea, P; Smirnova, M, 2021, *Communicating about housing in the UK: Obstacles, openings and emerging recommendations*
Miller, T; Gordon, S and Stanley, K, 2022, *Talking about homes: The foundation for a decent life*

[2] DHA Communications, 2025, *Talking about Homes – Evaluation of Phase 1 Mobilisation*

[3] See appendix for a fuller description of the methodology.

[4] Miller, T; Gordon, S and Stanley, K, 2022, *Talking about homes: The foundation for a decent life*

[5] See appendix for further detail on the tested framing strategies.

[6] Gordon, S, 2026, *How to talk about homes and immigration*

Appendix: Methodology

Cultural mindsets interviews

To identify mindsets that people in the UK use to think about homes and immigration, FrameWorks researchers carried out 20 in-depth cognitive interviews with a broadly representative sample of people from across the UK. Participants were recruited to represent variation across demographic characteristics, including age, gender, income, education, ethnicity, geographical location and (self-identified) political affiliation. Sample size is determined by when saturation point is reached. A sample is considered to be a satisfying size when new data do not shed any further light on common, underlying patterns of thinking within a population.

Interviews were held virtually in July and August 2025. These were one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately two hours. Interviews were designed to allow researchers to capture broad sets of assumptions, or cultural mindsets, that participants use to make sense of a concept or topic area – in this case, issues related to housing and immigration in the UK.

Interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions covering participants' thinking about housing and immigration in broad terms before focusing more specifically on particular concepts such as affordability and availability of housing, the causes and effects of housing problems, and what can be done to address these issues. Researchers approached each interview with this set of topics to cover but allowed participants to determine the direction and nature of the discussion. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants' written consent.

To analyse the interviews, researchers used analytical techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology to examine how participants understood issues. First, researchers identified common ways of talking across the sample to reveal assumptions, relationships, logical steps, and connections that were commonly made but taken for granted throughout dialogue. The analysis involved discerning patterns in both what participants said and what they did not say. In many cases, participants revealed conflicting mindsets on the same issue. In such cases, one conflicting way of understanding was typically found to be dominant over the other in that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants' thinking. To ensure consistency, researchers met after an initial round of coding and analysis, compared and processed initial findings, then revisited transcripts to explore differences and questions that arose through the comparison.

Analysis centred on ways of understanding that were shared across participants, as cultural mindsets research is designed to identify common ways of thinking that can be identified across a sample. Mindsets reported were typically found in a large majority of interviews. Mindsets found in a smaller percentage of interviews were only reported if there was a clear reason why they only appeared in a limited set of interviews.

Peer Discourse Sessions

Peer Discourse Sessions are a form of structured focus group designed to examine shared patterns of talk and how participants use prospective frames – introduced as primes or cues

by a moderator – when forming opinions and making decisions on a topic (Manuel & Kendall-Taylor, 2009).

A broadly representative sample of 36 people were selected to participate in six sessions. In order to mitigate against response bias, one of the sessions only involved participants who expressed their intentions to vote for the Conservative party or Reform UK at the next election, both of whom have a policy focus on immigration.

The first exercise in each session began with opening questions to elicit participants' default ways of thinking and talking about housing and immigration in a group context.

Next, participants engaged in an explanatory exercise. Participants split into two groups, each given four brief cases for why building more social homes was necessary. These cases were framed using strategies that FrameWorks researchers had hypothesised could helpfully increase understanding and support, based on the mindsets people hold on homes and immigration and pre-existing research[1]. These framing strategies were:

A. Government responsibility + problem
B. Government responsibility + problem + solution
C. Vision + solution + community
D. Problem + vision + solution + community

These were presented to participants as follows:

A) For decades, not enough social housing has been built by each government. Many social homes were bought by tenants and not replaced.	B) The government recognises that not enough social housing has been built in recent decades. They want to put that right. As a country, we used to build more social homes, and we can do so again now.
C) If we take the right steps, it's possible for everyone to live in a decent home that they can afford. In order to get there, we need to build more social housing. Our communities can do this.	D) Not enough social housing has been built for the past 4 decades. If we take the right steps, it's possible for everyone to live in a decent home they can afford. In order to get there, we need to build more social housing. Our communities can do this.

Each group was asked to imagine they were working for the local council, and to choose one explanation that could be used to convince a group of residents to build more social housing in their area. They then shared it with the other group, and were invited to respond to, and reflect on, the other group's explanation.

The second exercise was to respond to a comment from an audience member, stating that there was no need to build more social homes if immigration was reduced. Again, participants split into two groups, each given four brief strategies to use in their reply. They then shared it with the other group and were invited to respond to, and reflect on, the other groups' choice. These framing strategies were:

A. Common sense

B. Acknowledgement of shared struggle + shift responsibility
C. Collective/societal benefits
D. Reciprocity – with no mention of collective/societal benefits.

These were presented to participants as follows:

A) We need to look at the big picture. Even if migration to the UK stopped completely, the supply of affordable homes would still fall well short of what's needed. So building more social housing makes sense.	B) A lot of people are struggling with the cost of living. We need to look at who's really responsible for that. Private rents are too high, and big for-profit housing developers won't build the affordable homes people need.
C) More affordable homes being built in the UK benefits all of us. When we have the solid foundation of a home, we're more likely to be healthy, have jobs, and take part in our communities.	D) Most people who migrate to the UK are not eligible for social housing. Those who are would pay rent, just like anyone else in social housing.

Data from the sessions were analysed qualitatively. Researchers identified patterns in participants talk and common ways of making sense of the ideas introduced in the stimulus material. In analysis of all activities, researchers looked for commonalities across groups as well as differences.

Usability workshop

A session was then held with communicators working on housing and immigration issues. In this session emerging findings and recommendations were presented for input, and then refined to ensure the final recommendations were as useful and usable as possible.

[1] Miller, T; Gordon, S and Stanley, K, 2022, *Talking about homes: The foundation for a decent life*

About FrameWorks UK

FrameWorks UK is a not-for-profit, mission-driven organisation, specialising in evidence-based communication strategies that shift hearts and minds. We help charities and other organisations communicate about social issues in ways that create progress, through practical guidance underpinned by our framing research.

We're the sister organisation of the FrameWorks Institute in the US, which has been conducting framing research for more than 25 years. FrameWorks started working in the UK in 2012. And we established FrameWorks UK in 2021.

Change the story. Change the world.

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