

A framing toolkit

How to talk about homes and immigration

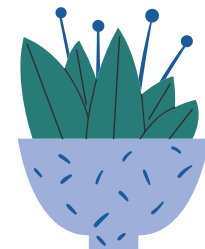


A FrameWorks UK toolkit, in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Nationwide Foundation.

This toolkit builds on the framing strategies set out in **Building a bigger us: how to talk about homes and immigration**. These strategies are designed to work alongside those set out in How to talk about homes and other materials from the **Talking about Homes** project.

In this toolkit, you'll find practical tips and tools for applying the framing strategies in a range of contexts including:

- ▶ How they can be applied to communications about homes.
- ▶ How they can be used when talking specifically about homes and immigration.
- ▶ How they can help to focus the conversation on the factors that will be most effective in improving our housing system.



About this work

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 has been working together with JRF 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. 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.

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 JRF, the Nationwide Foundation and Shelter, to develop an evidence base and understand how communicators who are pressing for more decent and affordable homes can best meet these communication challenges, and focus the conversation on improving our housing system.



How people think about homes and immigration

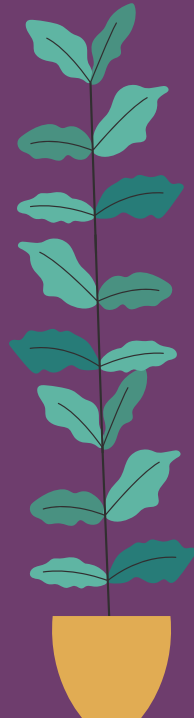
Mindsets are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we see the world and how we act within it. They are shared across a population, and activated by what we see and hear.

Once we understand the mindsets that shape people's thinking on an issue, we can identify which mindsets could helpfully be brought to the fore using framing, and which mindsets to background.

Two mindsets dominate public thinking about homes and immigration: **scarcity** and **fatalism**.

► **Scarcity** is the assumption that there are not enough resources (including genuinely affordable housing) to meet demand. If communicators don't talk about why affordable housing is limited, and how this can be changed, scarcity leaves room for zero-sum thinking – any additional demand is seen to be at others' expense.

► **Fatalism** is the assumption that problems with our housing system are too big and too complex to solve. This makes it easier for people to dismiss policies to increase the supply of decent and affordable homes as unworkable or as actions that won't be followed through. It directs attention away from what could be done within the housing system – and instead, towards lessening demand.



These ways of thinking are often used in combination with other mindsets to shape how people respond to communications and discussion about homes and immigration. Notably:

► **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 it comes to immigration, most people in our research believed that immigrants will take more than they will give.

► **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. 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.

For more detail on how people think about homes and immigration, take a look at the research briefing, [Building a bigger us: how to talk about homes and immigration](#).

What is framing?

Framing is the choices we make about what ideas we share – and how we share them. It's what we emphasise, how we explain an issue, and what we leave unsaid. These choices affect how people think, feel and act.

Unlike a set of key messages, framing strategies can be adapted to different contexts. This means we can tailor communications for different audiences, channels and outputs while talking about our issue in a consistent way.

Recommendations at a glance

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.



Putting recommendations into practice

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 a decent home benefits all of us helps direct thinking towards the need to increase the supply of homes, not only reducing demand. It means we don't trigger the scarcity mindset which prompts people to think that any increase in demand caused by immigration comes at a cost to British people.

Talking about homes as something that people need in order to contribute to a community and wider society can helpfully expand people's thinking. Rather than focusing on people needing to contribute before they 'take' any support, it makes space for thinking about what people need in order to contribute in the first place – like the foundation of a home.

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**: we all need a home.
- ▶ Explain how, when we have the solid **foundation of a home**, we're more able to contribute to society and take part in our communities.

Top tip

Use language like 'everyone' and 'all of us' to tap into ideas of collective benefits and shared needs.



How to do it

When talking about homes, more generally:

Instead of:

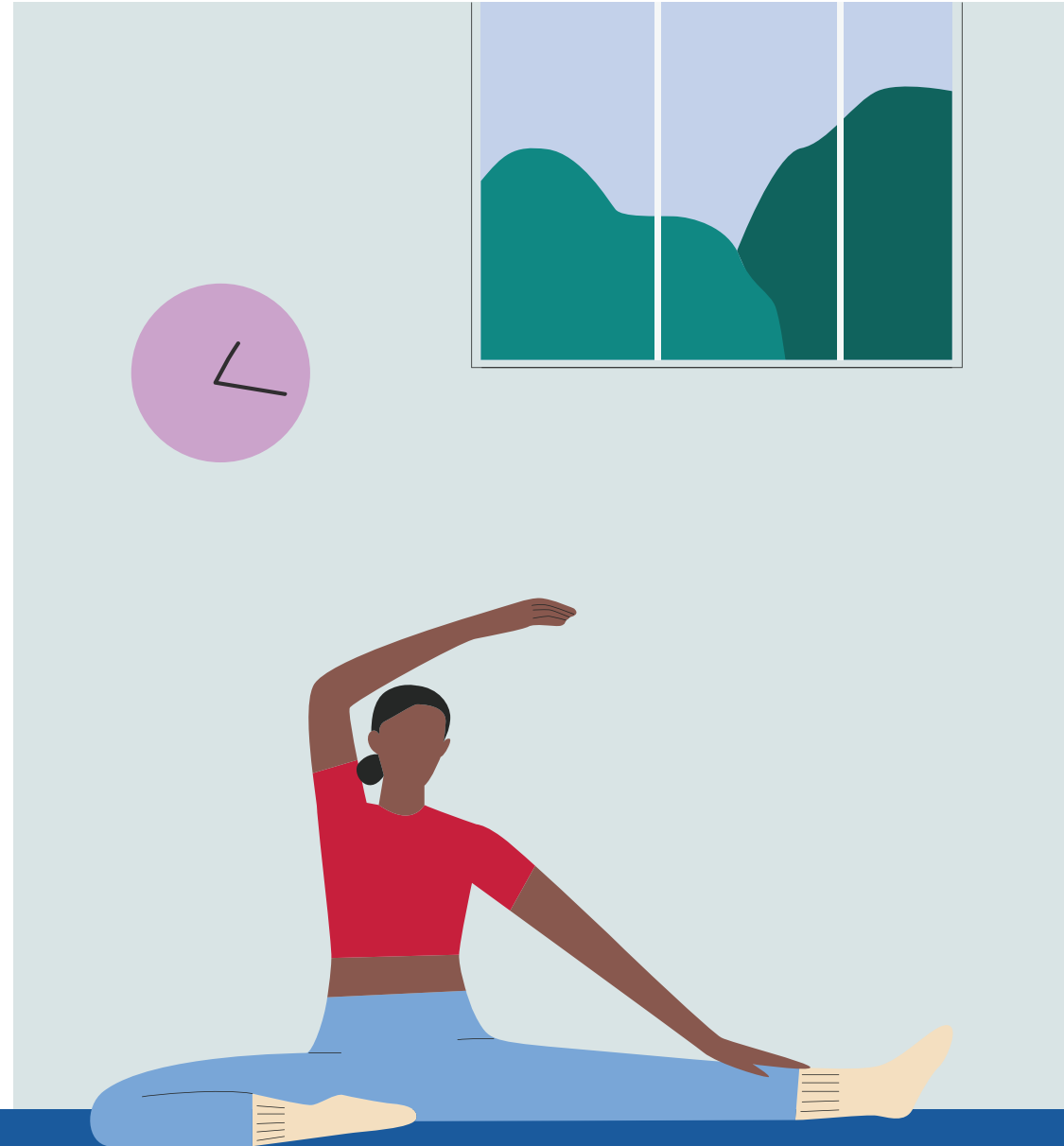
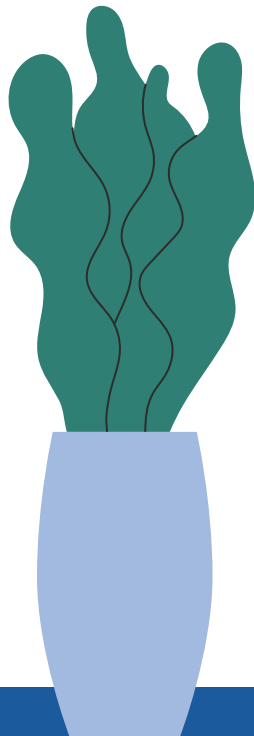
"We need to build more affordable homes to support people who are struggling the most. Not having the solid foundation of a home harms people's health, makes it harder to work, and makes people isolated."

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 play a 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 the idea that there isn't enough to go around and creates a sense of being in this together.



When talking about homes and immigration, explicitly:

Instead of:

“So many immigrants contribute to our society – think about all of the doctors, nurses and care workers. We can’t deny them the secure foundation of a home.”

Try:

“We all need the solid foundation of a home. It supports our physical and mental health, which in turn helps us to contribute to our community and wider society. This is true whether we were born in the UK or immigrated here.”

Why?

Pushing back on anti-immigrant rhetoric by highlighting immigrants who are hard-working or contributing to the economy can backfire by fuelling a narrow, transactional view of contribution and who ‘deserves’ a home. Instead, talk about what we all need in order to contribute.

Instead of:

“We’re working to support migrants by offering guidance and help to navigate the housing system and find the safety of a home.”

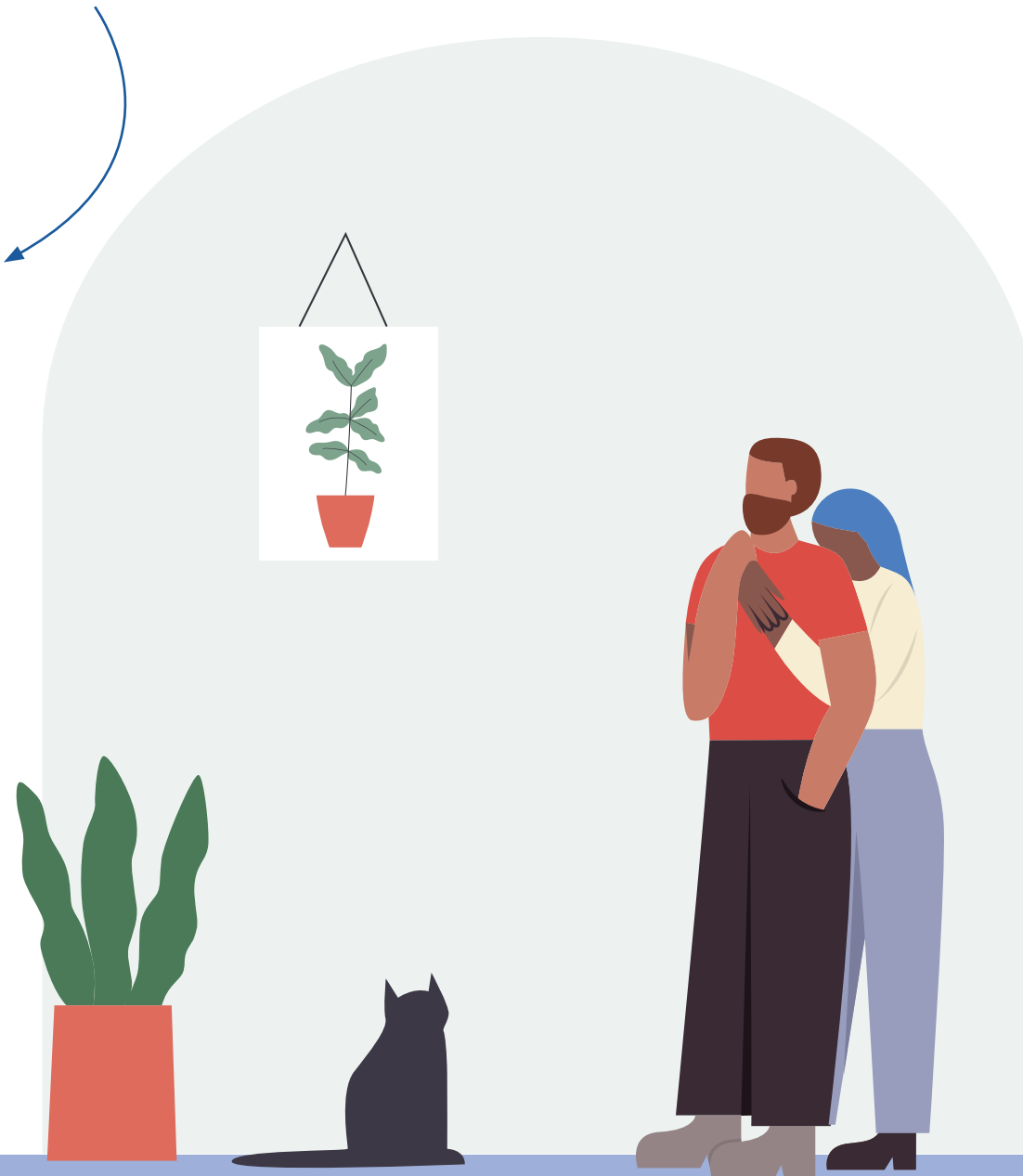
Try:

“We all need the safety and security that a home provides. That’s why we’re working to support people to navigate the complicated housing and immigration systems.”

Why?

Starting with a shared need that we all have in common – before talking about targeted support – helps to build a bigger us rather than triggering us-versus-them thinking.

The second example also starts to explain why people immigrating here might need targeted support (because they are navigating multiple complex systems). This could be explained further in longer text, and you could add why it benefits us all to make sure people receive targeted support like this.



Putting recommendations into practice

2. Make building communities part of the story

People are concerned not only about the lack of decent, affordable homes, but also pressures on services such as GPs and roads. This means 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 our home. Calls for more housing that do not acknowledge this, risk triggering concerns over too high a demand on local infrastructure.

Bringing in the role of communities is helpful too. People tend to see government as responsible for improving both housing and immigration in theory – but unable to make these improvements in practice. Talking about housing problems, such as the lack of social homes, as problems that our communities can play a part in fixing, helps us to avoid this fatalism. While the responsibility belongs to government, fixing the problem is shared, and therefore seen as more likely to be achieved – and in ways that take into account what communities want and need.



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.

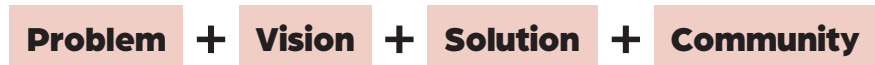
Top tip

Take opportunities across communications to paint a varied picture of what community is. Use language such as 'everyone in <location>', and so on, to avoid triggering the idea that some people are part of the community in question, and others are not.



How to do it

Try using these four ingredients to build your messaging:



Like this:



"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 to be built, and our Government should ensure developers take on board what communities need to thrive.

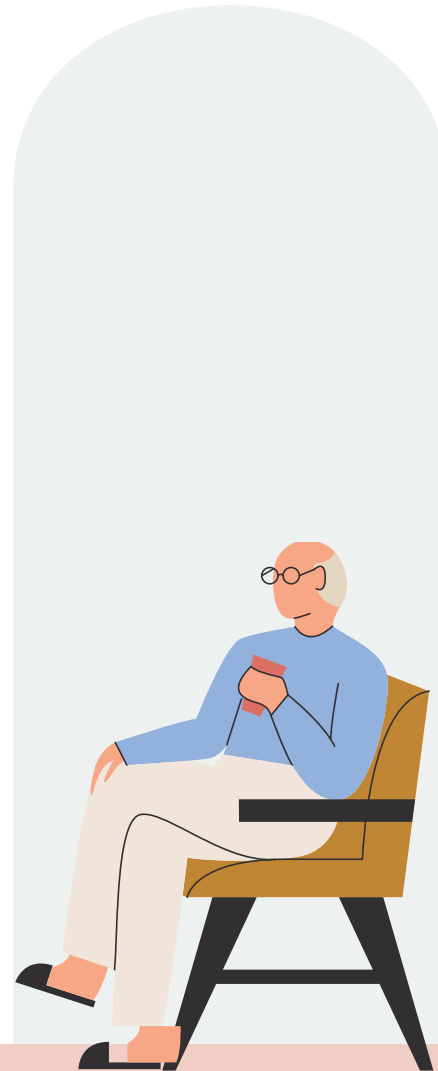
Because, too often, developers put profits before people – and the wider infrastructure that it takes to build a community, not just housing, is undermined."

Vision

Community

Solution

Problem



Instead of:

"We can't talk about building more housing in the UK without talking about the need for infrastructure to support more people living in certain areas. In too many places, GPs are already over-subscribed and transport is overwhelmed. We can't build more homes at the expense of our communities."

Try:

"Building more homes needs to go hand in hand with strengthening community infrastructure, like transport and GP surgeries. When we get it right, the whole community can thrive."

Why?

While it is helpful to connect building more homes with bolstering community infrastructure, the first example is likely to trigger the concern that there isn't enough to go around, rather than addressing it. Instead, see how the second example paints a picture of what is possible and the benefits to communities of getting it right, not just the risk of getting it wrong.

Putting recommendations into practice

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. In particular, communications need to build the belief that it is possible to increase the supply of decent homes in the UK – to rebalance the conversation away from solely reducing demand. Focusing on what is possible helps to orientate the conversation towards how we can improve our housing system – and avoid getting stuck at a narrow focus on immigration.

We also need to build people's sense that the Government can be effective in tackling housing problems. 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'. Breaking down challenges into clear steps, and showing how they can be addressed through concrete action also builds people's sense of efficacy – the belief that problems can and will be solved.

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**. 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.

Top tip

Use these recommendations to build a sense that change is possible early on in communications – as this will shape people's understanding of what follows.



How to do it

When talking about homes, more generally:

Instead of:

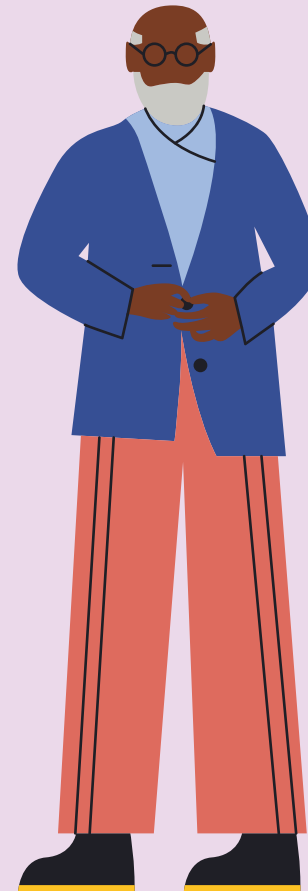
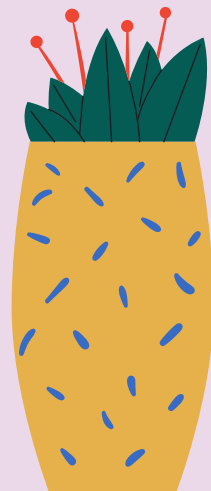
“For decades, successive governments have failed to build enough social homes. It’s about time that changed, so the Government’s promised boost to the Social and Affordable Homes Programme is welcome.”

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 10 years. This is a positive change, as not enough social homes have been built over recent decades.”

Why?

While the first example leads with Government inaction, the second example flips the order and emphasis. It leads with Government action. This helps to build the sense that change is possible. Given people’s fatalistic tendency to think that the Government won’t act, or won’t be effective when they do, 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. For too many years, much needed changes have been delayed or ignored entirely.”

Try:

“The new Renters’ Rights Act offers more protections to people renting – it’s a great example of how we can change the housing system for the better. And there are many more solutions that Government can use to tackle the housing crisis.”

Why?

The first example reinforces the sense that nothing will change – and triggers this idea early on. The second leads with an example of how the housing system is changing, and introduces the idea that there are many more possible solutions like this. When change feels possible, people are more likely to get behind it, and less likely to look beyond our housing system (to reducing immigration) as the answer.

Putting recommendations into practice

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. Building this understanding helps to counter the idea that the current state of the economy and shortage of homes is just ‘how things are’ and can’t be changed.

People already reason that, too often, profit is placed above people so we can also tap into this way of thinking to explain why more decent and affordable homes aren’t being built in the first place.

However, while criticism of ‘greedy’ profit-motivated behaviour by specific individuals, developers or construction companies may be met with agreement, it doesn’t make space for thinking about what could be done about it. It risks triggering the assumption that some people are simply greedy by nature. Telling a systemic story instead encourages thinking about how inequality in our housing system has been allowed to happen – and how the system could be redesigned to benefit our whole society. Our primary task as communicators is to spell out who can change things for the better – and how.

What to do

- ▶ Establish responsibility and accountability by **explaining how problems have come about**, building up over decades in our housing system.
- ▶ **Highlight:**
 1. examples of how parts of our housing system are set up to make profit
 2. how this is often to the detriment of collective benefits to communities
 3. how this could be changed through increased government regulation with the aim of rebalancing the system.
- ▶ Talk about **how the housing system could be redesigned**, rather than focusing on blame, or overstating the role of any one responsible body for causing housing problems.



Top tip

When we take the time to be more clear how the housing system works, we can have a better conversation about how it could be improved, and who is responsible for making these changes.

How to do it

An example, telling a systemic story about how profit has been prioritised over people:

Instead of:

"Unchecked greed in our housing system has led to developers prioritising high-end developments, rather than building the decent, affordable homes that communities really need."

Explains an example of how parts of our housing system are set up to make profit.

Try:

"Too often, housing supply is led by private developers who aim to maximise profit. This leads to a preference for high-end developments rather than the affordable homes that communities need. But the Government could change this by, for example, strengthening local authorities' and mayors' planning powers to shape development in the community's interest rather than putting commercial gain first."

Shows how this is often to the detriment of collective benefits to communities.

Shows how this could be changed through Government regulation with the aim of rebalancing the system.



Instead of:

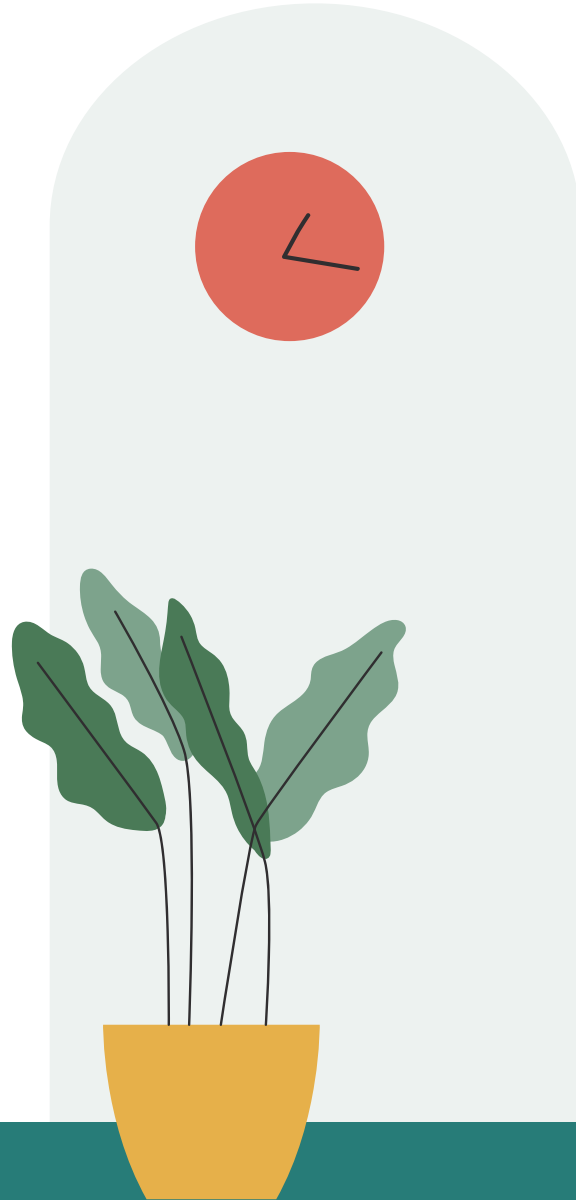
“We are facing a housing emergency. The Right to Buy scheme, through which many social homes were bought by tenants and never replaced, kicked the problem down the road. Now we’re having to deal with it.”

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. Better still – then say what can be done to fix this, and who can take action.



Reframe rather than rebut

Simply rebutting a statement with which we disagree, can work against us. When we rebut, we give more airtime to the argument we oppose, rather than using the time to make our case. Or, if we try to refute a statement using a fact, we often find the fact just ‘bounces off’ – because we haven’t addressed people’s underlying concerns. There are practical steps we can take to have more productive conversations.

Instead, it can be helpful to reframe the conversation. This starts with spotting the mindset or idea that sits behind the question or comment. Then we can work out the best way to bridge to a frame that primes more productive thinking.



For example, ‘What we see as an even bigger issue is...’, ‘There’s another part to this story...’.



Bringing it all together

These recommendations are designed to work together – but we don't need to use every recommendation every time. Here are a couple of examples of how we can bring multiple framing strategies together in different ways. We've broken them up to show which framing strategies have been used in each example.

When talking about homes, more generally:

By taking the right steps, we can make sure that more homes are built, and that communities are also strengthened in the process.

Too often, private developers put profits before people because they are driven to maximise value for their shareholders. This leads to the wider infrastructure that it takes to build a community, not just housing, being undermined.

But developers could bolster communities by listening to what they need and ensuring new developments add value to everyone in the community: for example, contributing to transport improvements, open spaces, and utility upgrades.

The Government could do more to enforce – or even raise – the minimum requirements for private developments so that supporting communities is baked into the system.

– **Vision of what's possible when we get it right**

– **Explaining how our housing system is set up to motivate actions by profit**

– **Explaining how this is often to the detriment of collective benefits to communities**

– **How communities could play a role in improving things**

– **Combining calls for building homes with calls for supporting community infrastructure**

– **How this could be changed through government regulation with the aim of rebalancing the system.**

When talking about homes and immigration, explicitly:

We need to build more social homes in the UK because, unlike private renting, social rents are linked to local incomes – this helps to keep rent affordable and stops people’s incomes from being squeezed.

We all need a decent place to call home that we can afford. And when more people have the secure foundation of a home, it’s good for everyone. It supports people’s health and makes it easier to be part of a community.

Focusing on immigration as the reason for the shortage of social homes distracts us from the fact that this shortage has built up over decades because governments allowed social homes to be sold off, and didn’t prioritise building more of them.

The Government’s boost to the Social and Affordable Homes Programme is a positive step towards changing this. And we call on Government to take further bold steps that would benefit us all.

– **Highlighting a solution: build more social homes**

– **A nod to our shared needs.**

– **A nod to collective benefits.**

– **Explaining how the shortage of social homes has come about.**

– **Showing that the Government can and should take action to change this.**

Further reading

Research briefings

- ▶ [Building a bigger us: how to talk about homes and immigration, 2026.](#)
- ▶ [Talking about homes: The foundation for a decent life, 2022.](#)
- ▶ [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.](#)

More guidance on how to talk about homes

- ▶ [A framing toolkit: How to talk about homes.](#)
- ▶ [Further guides on framing specific topics such as social homes and private renting.](#)

Visit jrf.org.uk/narrative-change to find all of the above resources.

About the author

This toolkit was written by Sophie Gordon, Principal Communications Strategist at FrameWorks UK, as part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Nationwide Foundation’s co-funded Talking about Homes project. It is based on research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Nationwide Foundation and Shelter.

Any questions? Get in touch with sgordon@frameworksuk.org or Natalie.Tate@jrf.org.uk

For more information about framing, visit FrameWorksUK.org

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