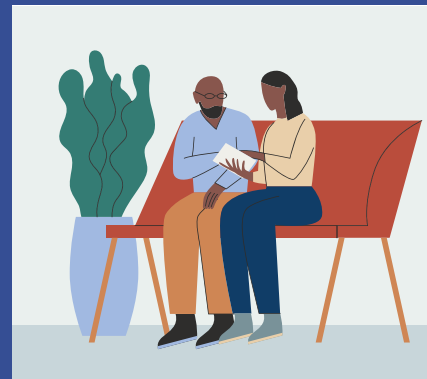
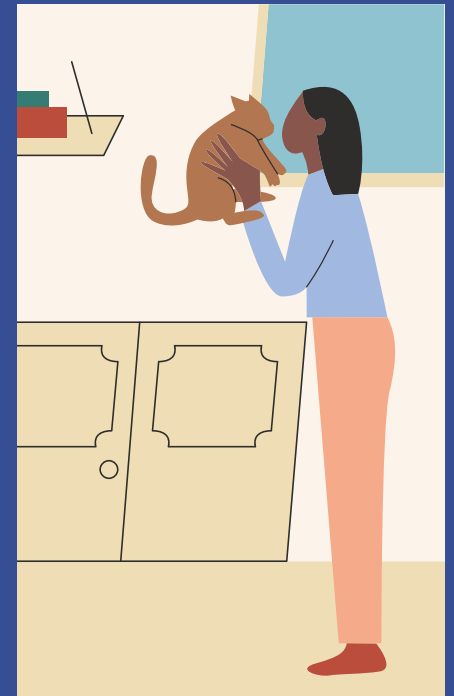


A framing toolkit

How to talk about homes



In partnership with



In this toolkit

You'll find practical tips and tools – appropriate not only for communicators in the housing sector, but for anyone who is talking and writing about homes.

This toolkit builds on the strategy set out in *Talking about homes: the foundation for a decent life* and previous guidance on talking about social housing, *Moving from concern to concrete change*.

If we are to
build a better,
more equal
society in which
everyone can thrive,
we must make
sure everyone
has access to
a decent and
affordable home.

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1. Introduction

People can see that the current housing system isn't working, but they tend to be less clear on how its problems can be solved, and how they came about in the first place.

When housing does get talked about, too often the stories we hear focus on the rise and fall of prices and how to get onto the 'property ladder'. These stories miss the fundamental point of why our homes matter, which is that they have a huge impact on our lives.

Together, we can provide people with answers about how the system is designed and how it can be redesigned through policy and practice change to give everyone access to decent and affordable homes. We can tell a story capable of helping to **shift the dominant understanding of housing as a source of wealth to homes as essential to a decent life.**



We need to start telling a new story

Some of the ways people think about homes act as obstacles to building understanding and support for things to change:

- ▶ Homes are seen first and foremost as a source of investment and wealth.
- ▶ Rented and social housing is seen as temporary, so 'a roof over your head' is perceived as sufficient while you're living there.
- ▶ There is a lack of clarity on exactly how decent and affordable homes *positively* affect people.
- ▶ Inequalities in the current housing system are considered the result of 'natural' market forces that are beyond anyone's control.
- ▶ People know that the housing system isn't working for everyone, but they think the solutions lie with individuals, not the system itself, defaulting to the belief that people who don't live in decent or affordable homes 'just need to work harder'.

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. Frames are more than key words or phrases. Frames are the ideas and principles that provide a scaffolding for you to build your communications, helping you to tell the same powerful story but in different ways – adapted for your audience and channels.

We can overcome these obstacles in thinking by making particular choices about how we frame our communications.

We need to:

- ▶ Shift thinking away from housing as a consumer good and towards homes as essential to a decent life.
- ▶ Tell a story with solutions and explanation at its heart to counter the fatalistic idea that the current housing system is 'natural' and can't be improved, and to show how it both can and must be changed.



1.1 Recommendations at a glance

The following recommendations are based on FrameWorks' research in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Nationwide Foundation. Read more about our research methodology and findings [here](#).

Our five recommendations

- 1. Talk about homes as a source of health and wellbeing** to build understanding of why access to decent, affordable homes matters.
- 2. Use an explanatory metaphor** to show how decent and affordable homes are essential.
- 3. Invoke people's sense of moral responsibility** to build the case for making decent and affordable housing available to everyone.
- 4. Combine a critical tone with explanations of solutions** to show who is responsible and build a sense of urgency and efficacy.
- 5. Put individual stories in context** to highlight how the housing system needs to change.

1.1 Recommendations at a glance

Keep homes at the heart

Talk about 'homes' rather than 'housing' or 'property' to trigger more productive thinking about 'homes as fundamental for a decent life' rather than 'housing/property as an asset'.

The language of 'homes' invokes the relationships and things that people need in their lives, beyond simply a roof over their heads, and is more likely to build understanding of a 'home as essential for a decent life'. Whereas 'housing' and, even more so, 'property', are more likely to trigger thoughts of 'housing as an asset' or as a 'basic' state welfare service.

Similarly, steer away from talking about 'the property ladder' and 'the housing market'. These terms can reinforce the idea of housing as a source of wealth that should be accumulated rather than homes as an essential source of wellbeing.

Instead of:

"Soaring property prices mean that too many people are being priced out of decent housing."

Try:

"Our homes are fundamental to our health and wellbeing. Decent and affordable homes must be available for everyone."



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2. Our recommendations

The following pages outline principles and tips for communicating about homes. Together we can build the understanding that decent, affordable homes are essential for a decent life.



Talking about homes as a source of health and wellbeing helps to expand people's understanding of why a decent and affordable home matters for everyone.

2.1 Talk about health, not wealth

While people do have some understanding of how their home is integral to their quality of life, this is something we need to remind people of and reinforce that it applies to all of us.

By connecting homes to our health and wellbeing, we can show why they matter, and why action must be taken to make sure everyone has a decent, affordable home.

How to do it
Position the current problems with the housing sector as problems that affect people's health and wellbeing.
Explain how decent and affordable homes are essential for people's health and wellbeing , especially their mental health.
Give examples of how decent and affordable homes positively affect people's health.



What's often said	And how it could be improved
<p>"Too many people are being forced to live in unstable, poor-quality housing which they can barely afford."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ By not just stating the problem, and instead connecting the issue to health and wellbeing, we can expand people's understanding of why this matters. ▶ Talking about 'homes' rather than 'housing' would help to shift thinking away from 'housing as an asset'.
<p>"Current house prices mean that the idea of buying a property is completely out of reach for most people."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Focusing on 'prices' and 'buying' plays into the unhelpful narrative of 'housing = a source of wealth'. Instead, show why this matters by talking about homes as a source of health and wellbeing. ▶ Instead of focusing on buying, we need to tell a fuller story that includes renting (both private and social renting). Otherwise, we reinforce the idea that renting is temporary, and that the quality of rented homes is unimportant.

What works well	Why this works
<p>"Our homes are fundamental to our health and wellbeing. If our homes are poorly maintained, with problems like damp and mould, it's putting our physical health at risk. But alongside this harm, the constant worry can lead to chronic stress, impacting badly on our mental health too."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ By leading with health and wellbeing, we set out why this matters and what's at stake. ▶ Mental health resonates with people as a highly relevant and timely issue.
<p>"Homes play a major role in our lives. When our homes are of decent quality, the comfort and security they provide enrich our lives and support our mental and physical health. That's why it's essential for everyone in the UK to be able to access and afford a decent home."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Giving examples of how homes positively affect our health and wellbeing will expand people's understanding beyond the negative impacts of poor-quality homes. ▶ Reinforcing that this is why everyone needs a decent, affordable home helps to broaden people's perspective and think in less individualistic ways.



Tread carefully if talking about how decent and affordable homes can benefit our economy

Talking about decent and affordable housing in terms of economic benefits doesn't shift thinking away from housing solely as a commodity or build understanding of why making access to decent and affordable homes for all matters.

So, as much as possible, focus on how decent and affordable homes enrich people's health and wellbeing: the value they bring to our lives, rather than to our economy.

If you need to use an economic argument for housing (such as, if you need to prove a particular policy is economically viable) we recommend only doing this after establishing the benefits to people's health and wellbeing. Providing explanations of how decent and affordable housing helps people thrive, and how that in turn benefits the economy (via a healthy workforce, for example), will help shift people's thinking towards understanding homes as fundamental to good lives.

Instead of:
<p>"We must invest in more decent housing in order to level up and boost our economy. We can't afford to go on like this."</p>
Try:
<p>"Decent, affordable homes support our mental and physical health. When our wellbeing is supported, we're able to thrive in our work and, as a result, contribute more to our society and economy."</p>
Or, you could say:
<p>"With the increased cost of living, decent quality, well-insulated homes are vital. Worries about heating costs are weighing heavily on people's minds. Improving the quality of social housing and relieving this stress is an investment in people's health – for now and in the future."</p>



2.2 Use an explanatory metaphor

Metaphors give us new, yet familiar, ways to think about an issue. Explanatory metaphors provide a strong mental image, make abstract or complex concepts simple and concrete, and can provide a comparison which helps build people’s understanding in a very immediate way.

Foundations metaphor

The Foundations metaphor evokes the idea that decent and affordable homes are fundamental to our lives.

Leverage this to show how it is the responsibility of the government and others like local authorities, developers and landlords to prioritise quality and affordability.

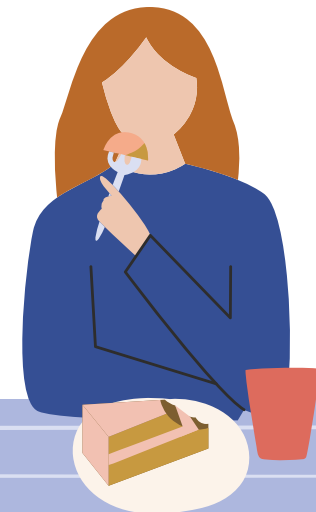
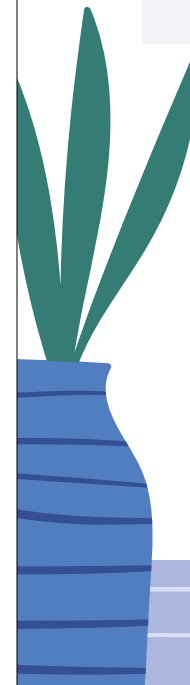
Note

This metaphor is effective for communicating to people on the right of the political spectrum. It doesn’t backfire for people on the left or centre, but nor does it achieve the same shift in thinking, probably because these people already showed more support for reform.

How to do it
Describe decent and affordable homes as the foundation of a decent life .
Use the Foundations metaphor to talk about the effects that decent and affordable homes have on life outcomes.
Give examples of how policymaking on housing has failed to create strong foundations for people’s lives and how the government could do better. This will help focus on government responsibility and downplay individualistic understandings of the housing crisis.

What this could look like in a headline

Instead of:	Try:	What’s working better?
“New social housing development will provide much needed homes for Glasgow families.”	“ New social housing development will provide a firm foundation for Glasgow families. ”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Foundations metaphor makes the same point that these homes are ‘much needed’ but in language which is sticky and tells a fuller story.
“UK house prices soar to new highs.”	“ Unaffordable homes increasingly undermining UK lives. ”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ By talking about how unaffordable homes are undermining people’s lives, we give more of a sense of <i>why</i> this matters. ▶ Calling out that these homes are unaffordable makes a stronger point that is less tied up in the commodity language of ‘house prices’.



What this could look like in longer copy

Instead of:	Try:	What's working better?
<p>"We all need to be able to afford decent housing. But poor policies – such as <add concrete issue/poor policy> have made this unattainable for too many and for too long. We need the government to <add solution> so that everyone can afford a decent home."</p>	<p>"Decent, affordable homes are the foundations for people's lives. For too long, these foundations have been undermined by <add concrete issue/poor policy>. We need the government to <add solution> so that everyone has a firm footing to build a good life."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Again, the metaphor helps to show why having a decent, affordable home matters, rather than just stating that it's something we need. ▶ Talking about how these foundations have been 'undermined' builds on the metaphor and points to who is responsible for this situation.



Tip: You can vary the Foundations metaphor using different language to get your point across. It's about using the idea rather than having to stick to certain words.

Examples include: stable, strong, supportive, fundamental, a firm footing, solid base, underlying, hard to build on, unsteady, unstable, crumbling foundations, undermining.

Clean Air metaphor
 A second metaphor of 'Clean Air' – the idea that a decent, affordable home is as essential as having clean air to breathe – **was effective for people across the political spectrum.**

Using this metaphor significantly increases understanding of the effects of our homes on life outcomes. It also helps to increase understanding of the factors shaping the housing market; challenging the notion that the market is beyond anyone's control.

However, this can be trickier to apply to messaging, and **care needs to be taken to not conflate it with the literal issue of air quality in and around our homes.**

So, if using this metaphor, **keep it simple.** Try not to overwork it, as the connection only needs to be light touch to build on people's understanding. This metaphor is about comparing clean air to decent, affordable homes, not making a case for clean air in itself.



2.3 Invoke moral responsibility

To overcome people’s fatalism and build a sense of collective (rather than individual) responsibility, invoke the idea that society has a **moral responsibility** to make decent and affordable homes accessible to everyone.

Talking about our collective moral obligation to ensure everyone has access to a decent and affordable home (not just any type of housing) will also help expand people’s thinking beyond housing as a temporary, basic need.

Values

Moral responsibility is an example of a ‘values frame’. Values frames tap into the deep shared beliefs that guide our thinking and behaviour. They establish a common ground around an idea that we hold as important.

How to do it
Talk about making decent and affordable homes available to everyone as a collective moral obligation . Use words like ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’ to build a sense that we’re all in this together.
Pair with concrete policy solutions .
Connect solutions with systemic changes to steer thinking away from individualism and a sense that ‘people just need to work harder’.

2.3 Invoke moral responsibility

What this could look like

“We all need more than just any basic roof over our heads. As a society, we have a moral responsibility to ensure everyone has a decent and affordable home. That’s why we need <add concrete solution>.”	“Right now, too many people are being forced to live in high-cost, poor-quality housing that’s putting a strain on their mental and physical health. We can’t stand by and let this happen. That’s why we must <add concrete solution> and rebuild our broken housing system.”
“When we fail to make sure that people have decent and affordable homes, we fail in our most basic responsibility to promote dignity and prevent harm from coming to others.”	“We need to do the right thing and make sure that everyone in the UK has a decent home at a reasonable cost. To live up to this responsibility, we need to <add concrete solution>.”

Some useful words and phrases

“As a society, we have a moral responsibility...”	“We can’t stand by and let this happen.”	“We can do better than this.”
“We must make sure that everyone can access a decent, affordable home.”	“We can’t deny people decent homes. We know how fundamental they are to a decent life.”	“We have a moral responsibility to treat everyone with dignity and respect.”
“Right now, we’re not living up to our responsibility...”	“We need to do the right thing.”	“Making sure everyone has a decent, affordable home is a responsibility we can’t ignore.”



Tip: Giving specific examples of policies that will ensure the availability of more decent and affordable homes will help build a sense of collective efficacy that improving the housing sector is possible.

The key thing to remember is that, while we can call out the housing crisis, we shouldn't leave people in crisis.


2.4 Combine a critical tone with explanation

People recognise that the current housing system is unfair and doesn't work for many people. A **critical tone** in messaging leverages and expands people's understanding of the government's role in the shaping the housing system and helps give a sense of urgency about the need for decent and affordable homes for everyone.

When paired with **explanations of systemic solutions**, the critical tone is especially productive and overcomes the fatalism that sometimes occurs when people aren't provided with solutions. The key thing to remember is that, while we can call out the housing crisis, we shouldn't leave people in crisis.



How to do it	What this could look like	
Name the housing crisis , to leverage existing understanding and show urgency.	▶ "Right now, we're facing a national housing crisis."	▶ "We're facing a national housing crisis."
Focus in on a specific part of the issue and how it has come about. Say who is responsible.	▶ "One of the symptoms of this crisis is people being forced to pay unaffordable rents for poor quality homes that put their health at risk. The government cannot continue to stand by and let landlords take advantage of people."	▶ "And it's time for the government to step up. Too many people are being forced to pay a massive portion of their income on rent, because the government has failed to protect them from runaway housing costs."
Explain how and who can fix it. Which housing policies can address these issues, what do they involve, and how will they help?	▶ "It must introduce a National Landlord Register to help hold landlords to account and give local authorities more resource to uphold renters' rights."	▶ "Creating a clearer definition of affordable housing that keeps rent below one third of local household income will ensure that the social homes are genuinely affordable for people who need it most."



Tip: People are largely unaware of specific housing policies or the changes that are needed, so they need a clear explanation of what each policy involves and exactly how it will address the current problems with the system. Tangible explanations will help build people's understanding and counteract fatalism.

Flexing the critical tone

We can dial up or down the critical tone for different audiences, channels and outputs; flexing it to be more measured or more strident. For example, a more emotive, strident tone can be particularly effective for campaigning communications, but you may want to use a more

measured approach in a one-to-one conversation or in a report.

Ultimately, you're the best judge on what works for your communications style and how far your organisation can push criticism of different responsible parties, such as the government.

Measured	Strident	
▶ "We need <responsible party> to take action and fix <issue>."	▶ "<Responsible party> must act now to tackle <issue>."	▶ "<Responsible party> cannot continue to stand by and let <issue> go on."
▶ "<Responsible party> needs to do more..."	▶ "<Responsible party> must step up and..."	▶ "<Responsible party> has failed to..."
▶ "<Failing/shortcoming> can and should be improved."	▶ "<Failing/shortcoming> isn't good enough."	▶ "<Failing/shortcoming> is a disgrace."

A note on the cost of living

People are very aware of the increased cost of living and the pressure this is putting on people. Showing how the housing crisis is being made even worse by this rise

in costs could help to make improving our housing system a more front-of-mind issue. Remember to talk about tangible policies that can help, to build efficacy and overcome fatalism.

What this could look like
"It might feel like the cost of living has suddenly spiked, but the cost of homes has in fact been rising as a proportion of income for many years, and successive governments have done little to address it. This means we're facing a housing crisis compounded by the extra pressure of rising cost of living. The government must unfreeze local housing allowance to ensure it reflects the actual costs of rent, and build more social homes to strengthen our housing system against future pressures."

Design/redesign

In addition to being critical of the current system and explaining solutions, we can counteract fatalism by explaining how the current housing system has been **designed and can be redesigned** through specific policy changes.

This challenges the common notion that the system is 'natural' and can't be changed. Similarly, language such as **build/rebuild** and **programme/reprogramme** does the same job of exposing how the system was created and does not have to stay as it is.

What this could look like

- ▶ "Our housing system is in crisis, but it doesn't have to be this way. Our government has the power and the moral responsibility to rebuild the broken system, starting with <insert specific solution>. With these changes, we can rebuild a system that provides decent, affordable homes for all and helps everyone live happy, healthy lives."
- ▶ "Our government has failed to take action and tackle the housing crisis. Our housing system isn't working, but they have the power to redesign it, starting with <insert specific policy>."



Tip: Connect specific ways to redesign the housing system, such as building more social homes, with the positive effects this has on people's health and wellbeing. This will go one step further in offering concrete solutions that people can relate to.



Explain how the current housing system has been designed and can be redesigned.

2.5 Put individual stories in context

To overcome the idea that individual work ethic determines where someone lives more than systems and structures, and to help people understand the role that systems play in the housing crisis, be sure to put individuals' stories into context when using narratives to talk about housing.

This means clearly pointing to how poor policies or the lack of government action have negatively affected people and how positive policies have – or could have – a positive impact. This approach will **help to bring systemic changes to the housing system to life.**



Tip: Balance out stories of poor policymaking and its effects on individuals – which are accurate and necessary to tell – with stories about what happens when people have access to decent and affordable homes. This shows that change is both necessary and possible.

How to do it
Make individual experiences part of a larger systemic story rather than a one-off, to show the role of policy and the wider system.
Tell positive as well as negative stories to show change is possible.
Talk about solutions or specific policies that would make the system fairer. Pair stories, both negative and positive ones, with specific policy solutions that address the housing crisis.

What this could look like

Negative impact narrative + critical tone and policy explanation	Points to note
<p>"Adam is renting privately because there is a severe shortage of affordable social housing in his area. He receives housing benefit to help him pay his rent, but because this support has been frozen, it doesn't cover the cost. He's left short by nearly £300 every month. Adam told us: 'I'm already working hard but my pay doesn't make ends meet. If I lose my flat, there's no plan B. I feel so hopeless.'</p> <p>"Until the government fixes our broken housing system, and there are enough genuinely affordable homes to meet demand, housing benefit must cover the cost of private rents for people on low incomes.</p> <p>"If the UK government invested in housing benefit so that it covered just the cheapest third of private rents, it could protect thousands of people in Adam's situation. It would also lift over 35,000 children out of poverty."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Include context for why Adam needs support (shortage of social housing) ▶ Use a critical tone, such as saying 'broken housing system', and point to who is responsible for change, such as 'Until the government fixes'. ▶ Include a specific solution, eg 'housing benefit must cover the cost'; and an explanation of that solution, in this case the impact of covering just the cheapest third of private rents. ▶ Show how this goes beyond Adam's individual story. In this example 'could protect thousands of people in Adam's situation'.



What this could look like

Positive impact narrative + link to health and wellbeing	Points to note
<p>“Our homes are the foundation for our health and wellbeing. We see this in Lisa’s story. Lisa and her family were finally able to move into decent, affordable social housing in January, and it’s been life-changing. Their previous home was riddled with mould and it felt damp even on warm summer days, so much so that it triggered Lisa’s child’s asthma and was a constant source of worry. Their new home is warm and dry, and Lisa could see a difference to her child’s health just weeks after moving in. Lisa told us ‘It’s like a weight has been lifted.’</p> <p>“Families shouldn’t be left in limbo, living with damp and mould due to a shortage of decent affordable homes. We urgently need the government to prioritise building more high-quality social housing so that every family has the strong foundations for a good life.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establish why this matters using the health and wellbeing frame and the Foundations metaphor. ▶ Talk about the positive health impact of a decent home to build understanding. ▶ ‘Families shouldn’t be left in limbo’ and ‘every family’ widens this out to others in Lisa’s position, showing it’s not a one-off case. ▶ Include context for why Lisa and her family needed support: shortage of decent affordable homes. ▶ Include a solution and who is responsible: in this case, the government must prioritise building more high-quality social housing.



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3. Bringing it together

You don't need to use all the recommendations in every communication, but they are designed to complement each other and work as a cohesive strategy. Consider what your main communications challenge is and which recommendation will address it best.

The following pages show some examples of how you can bring the recommendations together in different types of communications.

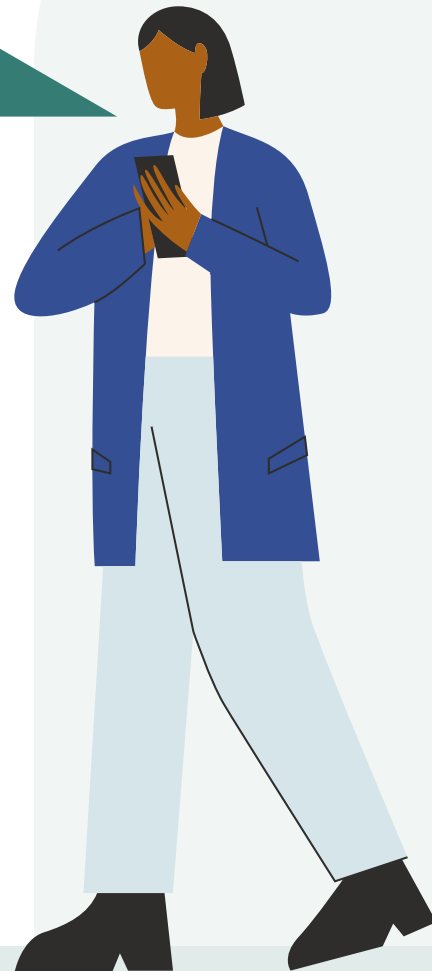


How it could look in a tweet

"As a society, we have a responsibility to make sure everyone has a decent, affordable home to support their health and wellbeing. It's time for the government to step up and introduce a clearer definition of affordable housing that will mean homes are genuinely affordable for all of us."

Why it works

- ▶ Invoking the value of moral responsibility to overcome fatalism and build a sense of collectivism.
- ▶ Using the language of 'homes'.
- ▶ Connecting homes to our health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Using a critical tone and pointing to who can and must take action 'It's time for the government to step up'.
- ▶ Introducing and explaining a specific policy that would make the system work better for everyone.



"The quality of our homes is fundamental to our quality of life. Our housing system needs to be redesigned so that health and wellbeing is put before profits; with landlords, local authorities and government all playing their part."

Why it works

- ▶ Using the Foundations metaphor to show why the quality of our homes is important.
- ▶ Introducing the idea that the housing system can and should be 'redesigned': it isn't 'natural' and it can change.
- ▶ Connecting homes to our health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Pointing to the responsibility of people in positions of power.



How it could look in longer copy

"We're facing a national housing crisis, and one of the most pressing issues is a severe shortage of social housing. The government has largely abandoned social housing delivery to private developers; a strategy that is not working.

"The shortage of social housing has forced many people on low incomes, who should benefit from access to the social rented sector, into the private rented sector. This pushes people into unacceptable circumstances, such as overcrowding.

"Our homes are fundamental to our health and wellbeing. As a society, we have a moral responsibility to make sure everyone has a decent, affordable home.

"That's why the government must build more social housing to meet this need. And they need to act now by providing sufficient housing benefit to help people pay for private rents until social housing becomes available."

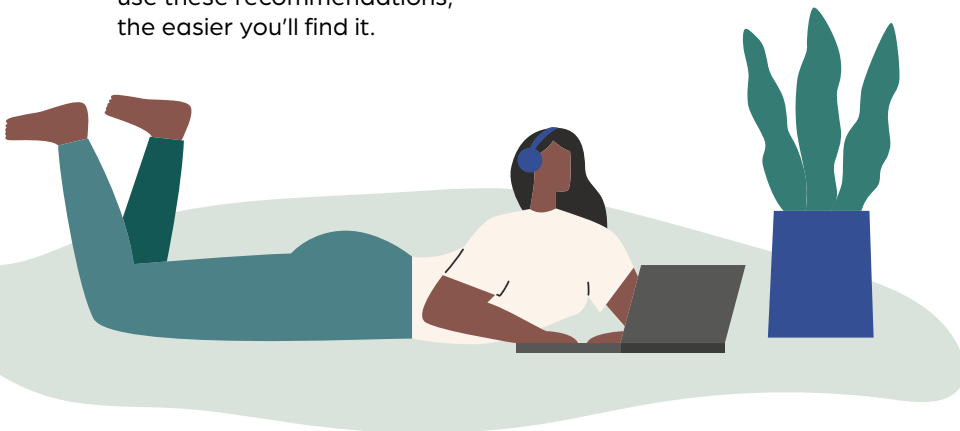
Why it works

- ▶ Describing the current housing situation as the 'crisis' it is.
- ▶ Focusing in on a specific part of the issue and how it has come about.
- ▶ Using a critical tone: eg 'largely abandoned', 'is not working'.
- ▶ Connecting homes to our health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Invoking the value of moral responsibility to overcome fatalism and build a sense of collectivism.
- ▶ Explaining which policies can address the issue and how they will help.

By telling
a new story,
we can build
understanding
and support
for things
to change.

3.1 Some final tips

- ▶ Repetition and consistency are essential. If you feel like you're using the same frames again and again, you're doing it right.
- ▶ Think of these recommendations as scaffolding for your communications. You can flex how you use them: use different tones for different audiences, and different creative executions.
- ▶ Remember, you are not your audience. They are not hearing these messages as often as you are and will tend to not have the same understanding of the issues and solutions.
- ▶ Avoid acronyms, jargon and technical language as much as possible, in favour of plain language.
- ▶ Get stuck in! The more you use these recommendations, the easier you'll find it.

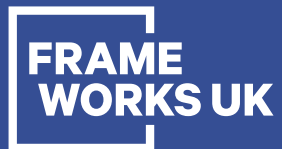


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Any questions? Get in touch at events@jrf.org.uk

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