How to grow support for building social homes

Increasing the number of social homes in the UK is vital for making sure everyone has a decent, affordable place to live. To build support for this, we need to demonstrate why building more social homes is both essential and possible.

We can do this by drawing on insights from research into framing homes, homelessness and poverty to answer three key questions:

► **What's this about and why does it matter?**

► **How does this work? And if it's not working, why not?**

► **What can we do about it?**

FRAME WORKS UK

In partnership with

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What are social homes and why do they matter?

What to do

Connect social homes with our health and wellbeing

Make the connection between social homes and health and wellbeing early and often. Give examples of how social homes positively impact our health and wellbeing, and the negative impacts of the shortage of these homes. For example:

> "Social homes offer more secure tenancies than private renting. This allows families to put down roots and plan for the future, instead of living with the constant stress of uncertainty."

Build understanding of what social homes are

Define what social homes are — simply and succinctly. For example:

> "Social homes are provided by either local councils or housing associations (not–for–profit organisations that own, let, and manage rented housing). They are designed to be more affordable than private renting and provide a more secure, long–term foundation for people's lives."

Watch out: Avoid leading with economic arguments

Talking about social homes in terms of economic benefits doesn't build understanding of why they matter. If you want to include an economic argument for social homes, do this after first establishing the benefits to people's health and wellbeing — or making this part of a wider point about how social homes prevent poverty.
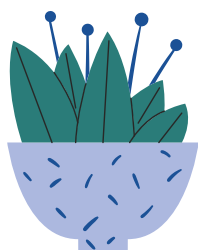
How do social homes work?
What's not working, and why?

What to do

Explain how social homes prevent poverty and hardship

▶ Use step-by-step explanation to walk people through how social homes prevent poverty and hardship. For example:

"Social homes can prevent people from becoming trapped in poverty, because they are the only type of housing where rents are linked to local incomes. So, this helps to keep rent affordable and stops people's incomes from being squeezed. Building more social homes would relieve this pressure for many more people."

▶ Use the metaphor of 'restricts and restrains' to show how providing social homes prevents poverty. For example:

"Social homes help to release people from the constraints of poverty."
"Social homes unlock opportunities for people to…"
"Spcial homes can help to loosen poverty's grip."

Show how supply and quality have been undermined

Break it down. Talk about how problems like shortages of social homes have come about, and who is responsible. For example:

"Since the 80s, successive governments have largely relied on private developers to take responsibility for building social homes. But social housing providers of all kinds have lacked access to the resources and powers needed to come close to meeting our need. Whoever runs our next government, we need them to step up and start taking responsibility again."

Watch out: Use data to support your story, not to tell it

To build support for more social homes, we need to go further than numbers. But well-framed data can be part of our story.

Remember:
• Place numbers in context. For example, compare the number of social homes that were built last year with other numbers, such as how many were built in previous years.

• Don't expect numbers to speak for themselves. Even if you take them out, your point should still be clear.

What can we do about the shortage of social homes?

What to do

Get specific about solutions — in the short and long term

Be specific about who needs to take action, and talk about the steps that need to be taken — now and in the future — to improve quality and increase the numbers of social homes. Balance efficacy (we can do it) with urgency (we must act) to help overcome fatalism. For example:

> "We urgently need our government to step up and invest in our health by building more social homes. From the Second World War up to 1980, we were building an average of around 126,000 social homes every year. Last year, there were only 7,528 new social homes. We've done it before, and we can do it again — but we need our government to act now and put in place a long-term plan for increasing the number of social homes."

Watch out: Don't over-do crisis messages

While naming the housing crisis can build salience and show urgency, if we go too hard with messages about 'crisis' and focus too much on the problem without offering solutions, we are likely to trigger a sense of fatalism.

Balance this out in both tone and content and make sure solutions aren't buried at the end of communications.

Further resources

- How to talk about homes (toolkit)
- Talking about homes: the foundation for a decent life (research briefing)
- Moving from concern to concrete change: how to build support for more social housing (research briefing)
- Talking about homes: What we can learn from homelessness and poverty research
- Talking about poverty (toolkit)

All of the above can be found at www.jrf.org.uk/housing