

**RISE**

Retrofit information,  
support & expertise

# The importance of communication

**RISE Discoveries**

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# Introduction

Claire Brown of RISE recently spoke with Polly Buckland, a Communications Consultant specialising in accessible engagement, and Andy Piper, Head of Sustainability at VIVID, to explore why communication sits at the heart of successful retrofit delivery. Both experts emphasised that while technical design and installation are central to retrofit, the quality, clarity and consistency of resident communication ultimately determines whether projects build trust, reduce disruption, and deliver positive outcomes.

*"It's such a critical part because it's not necessarily been focused on enough for a long time."*

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## The Importance of Communication in Retrofit

Communication has not historically received the same level of attention as technical standards, funding or program management. Yet many committees reviewing previous schemes have found that poor communication has been a recurring cause of resident dissatisfaction, delays and misunderstanding.

Polly highlighted that communication challenges in retrofit have been widely discussed across the sector, particularly in national forums focused on net zero and consumer experience, yet progress has been slow. Many organisations still see communications as an "added extra" rather than a core enabler of project.

### Challenges seen in previous schemes

Several persistent issues emerged from the discussion:

- Generic or unclear messaging can create anxiety, confusion or mistrust among residents, especially when timelines shift or on-site activity changes.
- Inconsistent language across organisations, contractors and surveyors can lead to conflicting information being shared with residents.
- Limited understanding of how residents prefer to receive information, for example, assuming digital channels are sufficient without checking accessibility needs.

Lack of coordination across the supply chain, where contractors, surveyors and internal teams engage residents in different ways, resulting in misalignment.

These issues often compound when resident-facing staff rely on their own scripts or assumptions rather than a shared communication framework.

## Key themes and insights

### 1. Communication must be embedded from the start

Both speakers emphasised that communication cannot be an afterthought or a late-stage activity. Clear, early engagement sets expectations, reduces uncertainty and prevents small issues escalating. Many failures in past programmes stemmed not from technical problems but from unclear or last-minute messaging.

### 2. Accessibility must shape communication content

Polly's work across housing, education and VCSE organisations shows that residents have diverse needs and preferences. This means "*creating communications that most, if not all people can actually consume*" should be the main objective of the delivery. Effective communication means ensuring information is:

- Simple and jargon-free
- Available in multiple formats
- Easy to consume for residents with different literacy levels, digital access or support needs.

Often, printed materials still outperform digital channels for retrofit communication, especially when works directly affect the home.

### 3. Consistency across the supply chain is crucial

It is highly emphasised that successful communication requires a whole-system approach. Even when internal teams use consistent, accessible language, issues arise if:

- Surveying companies explain retrofit incorrectly
- Contractors give different timelines or commitments
- Multiple touchpoints each use their own communication style.

This inconsistency can undermine trust, even when the technical delivery is strong. An improved understanding of "*how we want to engage with customers as a business*" was recognised by VIVID as a key driver for improved communications. VIVID's solution was to create a communications playbook to align everyone involved in resident engagement.

### 4. Communication quality is a marker of contractor performance

Residents form opinions of the project long before installation begins. Contractors who simply "*knock a few times and move on*" without meaningful engagement signal potential problems later in the delivery process. High-performing contractors

demonstrate persistence, clarity and respect in their early communication behaviours.

### **5. Organisations should validate communication methods with residents**

A recurring practical message from Polly was to “ask your customers first how they want to be consuming this information before you lay out any budget.” Some organisations invest in portals, apps or videos without confirming whether these formats work for their residents. Simple resident insight exercises can prevent misplaced investment and strengthen engagement.

## **What does this mean for housing providers?**

The insights shared by Polly and Andy underline that communication is not peripheral, it is a fundamental pillar of successful retrofit delivery. For housing providers, this means recognising that clear, consistent and accessible engagement directly shapes resident experience, programme efficiency and overall outcomes. Strong communication helps to:

- Build trust and reduce anxiety.
- Ensure residents understand the purpose, expectations and impact of the works.
- Align contractors, surveyors and internal teams around a shared and consistent message.
- Prevent issues arising from confusion, incorrect assumptions or mixed messaging.

Fundamentally, effective communication reduces risk and increases the likelihood of delivering retrofit programmes smoothly, safely and with resident confidence.

## **What are the next steps?**

To apply these lessons in practice, housing providers should:

- Embed communication early in programme planning rather than as an afterthought.
- Test and validate formats with residents, ensuring materials are accessible, preferred and clear.
- Establish consistent messaging across all partners, internal teams, contractors, surveyors and engagement staff.
- Provide tools, guidance and training, such as communication playbooks, to ensure alignment and quality.
- Use multi-channel, property-specific updates so residents receive the right information at the right time.

By taking these steps, providers can strengthen engagement before, during and after retrofit works, leading to improved satisfaction, fewer complications and better programme outcomes.

**Links to resources referenced:**

[RISE podcast | Podcast on Spotify](#) - Podcast regarding this topic coming soon.

[VIVID | Leading providers of affordable housing](#)

**Additional resources:**

[Resident Engagement for Warm Homes Retrofit Projects – RISE](#)

[Embedding social value and equality, diversity and inclusion in retrofit programmes – RISE](#)

[Engaging residents between funding announcements - RISE](#)



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