



RISE

Retrofit information,
support & expertise

Making Retrofit Make Sense for Residents

Quick guide

July 2026

Funded by:



Department for
Energy Security
& Net Zero

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Summary

Technical solutions alone do not deliver successful retrofit projects. Residents play a critical role in whether retrofit programmes succeed, yet simply providing information is rarely enough to encourage participation. Successful engagement combines clear information with motivation, trust-building, storytelling, and behavioural insights that help residents understand the personal value of retrofit and feel confident taking action.

This guide provides a practical introduction to communicating retrofit with residents. It is designed for housing providers, local authorities, and retrofit practitioners looking to improve resident engagement and participation.

Readers that would like this document in a more accessible format should contact rise@turntown.co.uk.

What is ‘Making retrofit make sense for residents’?

Making retrofit make sense means helping residents understand retrofit in terms that are relevant to their **everyday lives** rather than focusing solely on technical measures, carbon savings, or policy objectives.

Retrofit communications should explain:

- What changes are being proposed.
- What residents can expect during delivery.
- How the improvements will benefit them personally.
- What actions they need to take.
- Where they can access support and information.

Effective communication goes beyond raising awareness. It seeks to build understanding, foster trust, and support informed decision-making. Developing a successful resident engagement and marketing approach requires working closely with local stakeholders to understand community needs, perceptions, and potential barriers to action. Engaging stakeholders early helps secure their buy-in and support, enabling trusted local organisations, community leaders, and networks to act as credible voices in communicating the benefits of retrofit. Successful communication combines clear information, trust-building, storytelling, and behavioural insights to help residents understand the personal value of retrofit and feel confident making decisions that are right for them.

Why resident engagement matters

Many retrofit programmes assume that providing information will naturally lead to action. However, behavioural research shows that people do not always make decisions based on logic alone.

Residents may:

- Prefer familiar routines and existing behaviours.
- Be concerned about disruption or inconvenience.
- Feel overwhelmed by complex information.
- Delay decisions due to uncertainty.
- Focus on immediate priorities rather than long-term benefits.

For this reason, successful retrofit programmes focus on persuasion rather than simply information provision.

Residents are more likely to engage when retrofit is framed around benefits they care about, including:

Benefit	Why it resonates
Lower energy bills.	Reduces household costs.
Warmer, more comfortable homes.	Improves everyday living.
Health and wellbeing.	Reduces cols, damp and associated impacts.
Energy security.	Greater resilience to rising energy costs.
Community pride.	Creates positive local change.
Future-proofing homes.	Protects long-term value and performance.
Environmental benefits.	Supports climate action goals.

Different audiences respond to different motivations, so understanding resident's priorities is essential before designing communications.

How to communicate retrofit effectively

1. Frame the message around resident priorities

How retrofit is presented can significantly influence how residents perceive it. Framing refers to the way information is communicated and the aspects that are emphasised.

Instead of:

"We're installing external wall insulation to improve energy efficiency."

Consider:

"This improvement could help keep your home warmer in winter and reduce heating costs."

Choose a primary message that is most relevant to the audience and reinforce it consistently. Avoid trying to communicate too many benefits at once, which can create information overload.

2. Use credibility, emotion and logic

Strong communication balances three elements:

Element	Purpose	Examples
Credibility (Ethos)	Builds trust.	Expert advice, trusted organisations, local champions.
Logic (Logos)	Provides evidence.	Data, comparisons, savings estimates.
Emotion (Pathos)	Creates connection.	Resident stories, lived experiences, aspirations.

The most effective communications use all three together.

3. Explain the reason behind requests

People are more likely to respond positively when they understand why they are being asked to do something. Communications should clearly explain the purpose behind actions such as surveys, assessments, appointments, or consent requests.

For example:

"Please confirm your appointment because this helps us assess how your home can be made warmer and more energy efficient."

4. Tell stories, not just facts

Stories help people understand complex issues and make information more memorable. They also create emotional connections and demonstrate how retrofit has benefited others.

Consider using:

- Resident case studies.
- Before-and-after experiences.
- Testimonials.
- Visual examples and imagery.
- Community success stories.

Stories can make retrofit feel tangible, achievable and relevant.

5. Apply behavioural insights ("nudges")

Small changes in how choices are presented can encourage participation without restricting choice. This approach is known as "**nudge theory**".

Examples include:

Reduce friction

- Pre-filled forms
- Simple sign-up processes
- One-click booking links

Use social proof

- Share how many neighbours have already participated
- Highlight local success stories

Personalise communications

- Use resident names
- Tailor messages to property types or local areas

Reach residents at the right time

- During cold weather
- Following energy price increases
- When residents move home or renew tenancies

Break decisions into manageable steps

- Start with a survey
- Then an assessment
- Then installation planning

Tips for resident communications

Effective resident communication should adopt a multi-modal approach, using face-to-face engagement, written materials, flowcharts, and other visual and digital resources to make information accessible, build understanding, and support informed decision-making.

When preparing communications:

Lead with the hook.

Capture attention quickly by focusing on the most relevant resident benefit.

Keep messages simple.

Use short, clear language and avoid technical jargon.

Explain "So What?".

Always make the relevance clear to residents.

Include a clear call to action.

Tell residents exactly what you want them to do next.

Remember "Because".

Explain why action matters.

Design for skim readers.

Use headings, bullet points, visuals and short paragraphs.

Managing challenges and concerns

No retrofit programme is without risks. Resident concerns, misinformation, delays, or unforeseen issues can affect engagement if not managed effectively.

Before launching communications:

- Identify potential concerns
- Prepare responses to likely questions
- Develop clear key messages
- Ensure communication teams and delivery teams are aligned

When responding to issues, use the **3Cs**:

Calm

Acknowledge concerns and avoid blame.

Constructive

Explain what action is being taken.

Clear

Communicate facts simply and directly.

Next steps

To improve resident engagement in retrofit programmes:

1. Understand your audience and their priorities.
2. Frame retrofit around benefits that residents value most.
3. Use clear, focused messages supported by evidence and stories.
4. Simplify participation and reduce barriers wherever possible.
5. Build trust through transparency, consistency, and responsive communication.
6. Monitor feedback and continuously refine your approach.

Successful retrofit goes beyond just improving buildings. It is also about helping people understand, trust, and embrace the changes that make those improvements possible.

Additional resource

RISE masterclass:

[The Importance of Language in Retrofit - RISE App](#)

[Accessible Resident Engagement - RISE App](#)

RISE podcast:

[Nudging tenants towards energy efficiency - RISE App](#)

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

RISE toolkit:

[Engaging Your Offline Residents in Retrofit Projects - RISE App](#)

[Supply Chain Advice Pack: Neurodiversity and Retrofit - Residents - RISE App](#)

[The Importance of Communication - RISE App](#)

[Developing an engagement approach - RISE App](#)



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