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Bespoke Resident Engagement in Retrofit

Toolkit

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www.riseretrofit.org.uk

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Summary

We know that communities are diverse. This diversity is created through the unique climate, geography, housing types, civic amenities, and importantly, the people who call it home.

Each community has unique requirements to be considered when developing a resident engagement plan for retrofit. Different demographics and those with additional needs should be thought about, to ensure that a plan for domestic retrofit works is inclusive of and accessible to all. Without this inclusivity, the project is less likely to get backing from residents, leading to lower access and success rates.

Accessible and suitable resident engagement is ensuring that the proactive efforts made by asset or tenancy managers to involve residents in community life can be reached, used, or understood by everyone, especially those who need it and including those with disabilities or specific medical needs.

Developing and delivering a successful retrofit project therefore requires a strong, detailed and bespoke resident engagement plan. This toolkit explains the importance of inclusive, accessible resident engagement and will help you to develop a bespoke strategy that follows best practice to deliver inclusive retrofit outcomes to a high standard.

This toolkit has been developed for retrofit projects because they require a different approach to resident engagement. This toolkit can also help support any future applications for retrofit grant funding.

Who should use the toolkit?

The toolkit has been designed to help Social Housing Providers, Local Authority (LA) officers and other stakeholders involved in Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund with the delivery of retrofit project(s). Those responsible for developing and delivering the project's resident engagement plan will get the most value from the toolkit. This toolkit will support you to create a bespoke engagement plan that ensures inclusivity for all residents. This will include content on how to reach all of your residents and what considerations should be made in different scenarios.

When should you use the toolkit?

Use this toolkit whilst developing the initial ideas for the retrofit project, and in securing support and funding. It should be used from the initial outline application stage, during project delivery and after the retrofit is completed. It is essential for contractors to understand the importance of resident engagement within their role. For this reason, a resident engagement plan should be included within any contract specification and be regularly updated and refined as the latest information becomes available. This toolkit is viable for both long term and short term 'one off' retrofit projects.

Bespoke requirements

To produce a bespoke resident engagement plan, you will need to consider the project itself (i.e. the scope, scale and geographical setting), but also the demographics of your intended audience. Also consider the idea of co-creation in the development of your plan.

No two tenants will be the same, meaning one method of resident engagement will not be suitable for all in your community. If an engagement plan is not suitable or accessible for certain demographic groups, you risk the success of your wider retrofit programme.

There are a range of demographics to consider when developing a resident engagement plan bespoke to your residents.

Aging population

The UK has an aging population (figure 1). The provision of appropriate housing is crucial in helping the elderly live safe and independent lives.

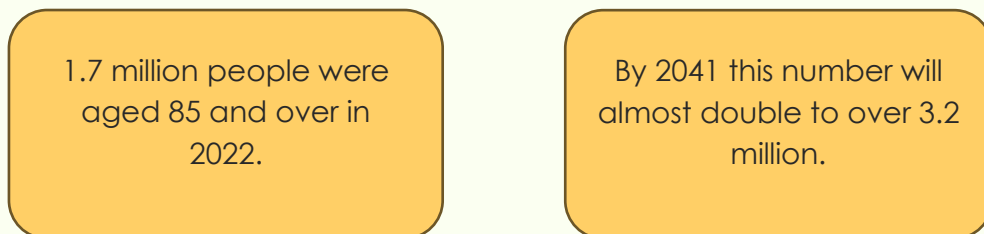


Figure 1 contains basic demographic data about the UK's aging population. Source: [ONS](#)

In terms of engaging elderly residents, you will have to consider any additional, specific requirements from retrofit (e.g., ramps, handrails) and their access (or lack of) to technology. Ensuring elderly residents understand their home retrofit process involves clear communication, regular updates, and active engagement. It is also important to take on board any requirements for communication methods. Make sure residents are asked about their preferences for communication methods.



Purely online resident engagement may not be suitable for those with limited access to technology or the internet.



Newsletters delivered to each home, in person meetings, or phone calls may be more suitable for some residents.

Language

The community you are engaging with, as part of your retrofit project may be made up of a number of different cultures and languages, including languages used by those with visual or hearing impairments. Therefore, you should consider tailoring your approach to cater for a variety of languages. And making sure it is bespoke to the community where the retrofit project will take place.

It is important to consider language in combination with the variety of engagement methods being employed.



A physical letter written in English may not be accessible to non-English speaking residents.



An email outlining potential works, written in English, but easily translatable online to a multitude of languages.

Reading age of UK Adults

As well as the actual language used, it is important to consider the reading ability of the residents for any communication plan. According to the National Literacy Trust:

1 in 6 (18% / 6.6 million people) adults aged 16 to 65 in England have very poor literacy skills.

Source: UK Government.

This means that any communication plan for resident engagement should consider the language and sentence structure in the information that is provided.

Vulnerable residents

Retrofitting people's homes can be quite a disruptive process, and for some residents, the thought of letting strangers into their home to carry out the required works will be their main concern. They might have had a negative experience in the past which is influencing their worries.

Those who live alone, or those who have experienced abuse may have added apprehension about strangers coming into their home. In this situation, clear communication throughout the process is key.

Residents should know the who, what, when, why and how of your retrofit project in terms of their houses' involvement. Who will need access, what they will be

doing, when will they be doing it, why are they needing to do this, and how will this retrofit project be affecting them in their daily lives?

It may be beneficial to offer a support officer on the days their house will be undergoing works. Knowing they can contact someone if needed may help alleviate some stress for vulnerable residents.

Disabilities

A person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. 365,000 disabled people in England were found to have unmet housing needs by [Inside Housing and the Government](#).

This could conflict with the ambitions of the Equalities Act:

The Equality Act (2010)

Legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. This Act covers nine protected characteristics including age and disability.

Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations (2018)

Require public sector websites and mobile apps to be more accessible by making them 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'.

Several disabilities and mobility, visual or hearing impairments, can impact the success of a resident engagement plan. Some key considerations include:



In-person events may not be suited to those who are physically or mentally impaired.



An email outlining potential works, social media posts and telephone calls may be more suitable for some residents



Written materials or verbal discussions would not be suitable for those with audiovisual impairments.



Providing information in accessible formats such as braille, or using sign language interpreters can enhance engagement.



Group settings may not be suitable for those suffering with anxiety or stress when in social settings.



Phone calls or home visits would remove the stress that can accompany attending group settings.

Understanding your audience

The primary challenge to creating a bespoke resident engagement plan is being able to understand your audience. Without knowing what demographics to consider and cater to, your resident engagement plan will fall short.

It is therefore crucial to engage with your community before any plans are drawn up. Everyone is an individual, everyone has a preference for how they like to receive information. There might be multiple people in one home who need different methods. There might be unregistered disabilities you need to be aware of.

One way to work past this challenge is through designing your engagement plan inclusively.

Benefits of inclusive design

An inclusive co-design process to develop your project's resident engagement plan could be particularly beneficial when retrofitting social housing for a number of reasons.

Enhanced understanding of needs

Engaging residents in the planning process ensures that their specific needs and preferences are understood and addressed. This can lead to more effective retrofitting solutions that improve living conditions and meet the unique requirements of different households.

Increased satisfaction and acceptance

When residents are involved in decision-making, they are more likely to support and accept the changes. This can reduce resistance and increase satisfaction with the retrofitting process, leading to smoother implementation and better overall outcomes.

Improved design and functionality

Residents can provide valuable insights into the practical aspects of their homes. Their input can help identify potential issues and opportunities for improvement that might be overlooked by planners and designers.

Enhanced community cohesion

Inclusive engagement fosters a sense of community and collaboration among residents. This can lead to stronger social ties and a more supportive environment, which is beneficial for the overall well-being of the community, and may increase project access rates.

Increased transparency and trust

Involving residents in the retrofitting process builds trust between them and their housing provider. This method ensures transparency in decision-making and helps residents feel more confident that their interests are being considered.

Sustainable outcomes

By considering the needs and preferences of residents, retrofitting projects are more likely to be successful in the long term. This can lead to improved energy efficiency, reduced maintenance costs, and better quality of life for residents.

The feedback loop

Collecting feedback from residents after delivering retrofit to their homes is crucial for several reasons. This feedback can assess effectiveness of both the retrofit measures, but also the engagement methods themselves. This knowledge will then support any future projects through highlighting what worked well and what barriers were faced. Residents can provide insights into any problems or inconveniences they experienced during or after the retrofit process. Showing residents that you value and respond to their feedback will also foster a sense of satisfaction and build trust.

In some cases, collecting feedback is also necessary for compliance with funding or regulatory requirements. The Warm Homes: Local Grant and Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund both require applicants to adhere to PAS2035, which includes the requirement of project feedback and evaluation.

By actively seeking and utilising resident feedback, organisations can ensure that retrofit projects are effective, resident-focused, and continuously improving.

Useful documents

For further information on how to plan and deliver successful resident engagement strategies within your retrofit programme, please take a look at the content already available on our website:

- [Resident Engagement Toolkit](#) - Toolkit
- [Planning resident engagement](#) – Article
- [Handover to residents](#) - Article



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