



Toolkit for members

Responding to migration concerns.



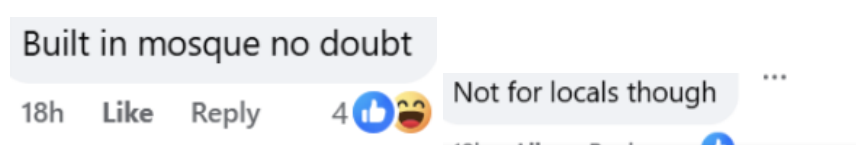
Toolkit for members – responding to migration concerns

Housing associations and co-operatives are increasingly navigating tricky conversations about migration and housing. One of the biggest challenges they face is misinformation about how social homes are allocated. This misunderstanding doesn't just affect staff; it impacts current tenants and people waiting for a home as well.

A common misconception is that refugees and asylum seekers are given priority for social housing. This belief has taken hold among some politicians, members of the public, and individuals on waiting lists, even though it doesn't reflect how allocations actually work. These perceptions can create tension, frustration, and mistrust, making it harder for housing associations to manage expectations and maintain positive relationships with the communities they serve.

Addressing these misunderstandings through clear communication is crucial. By explaining how housing allocation works and tackling myths head-on, housing associations can reduce friction and ensure that everyone feels informed, supported, and treated fairly.

Some examples are from a recent story from a member about a new development:



For colleagues who might face queries, comments or demands via social media or local press, we've outlined below some draft responses that may be useful to use based on existing evidence and best practice. These can be amended and tweaked to suit local circumstances.

Fundamentally, it is that the housing emergency exists because of decades of underinvestment in social homes and is not new or caused by migration, and this is the message that SFHA has been positioning with all stakeholders and audiences. A quarter of a million people in Scotland are on waiting lists for social housing, with only a small percentage due to international migration. We have looked to make this point across with the empathy that reflects our housing association movement and values.

Pre-empt with positive, clear messages and stats (where appropriate):

- Details of allocations policy/FAQs “Who gets a social home? How? Etc”
- How to videos – staff explaining the allocation process and assessments etc
- Stats on where homes went this year – local stats can highlight a different reality to national narratives.
- Case studies of tenants receiving homes

Points to keep in mind when engaging:

- **Know when to engage.** Not every engagement with you on this issue, particularly social media, warrants a response. Only respond if what is said is factually wrong; if it undermines the organisation, staff safety, or tenant confidence in the organisation. Do not respond to deliberate trolling, isolated comments with low visibility, or to posts/comments that might amplify misinformation.
- **Don’t myth-bust.** ‘Myth busting’ has been found to be largely ineffective, instead it reinforces the myth. Rather than pointing out why someone’s incorrect, outline the situation as it is using examples of what you’re doing where possible.
- **Know when to disengage.** Avoid repeatedly responding to a person on social media, it continues the discussion and can escalate. One response is sufficient unless they’re bringing up something materially different.
- **Remember tone.** To respond to difficult social media posts, first pause and assess, then acknowledge with empathy, offer solutions, and move detailed discussions offline, while knowing when to disengage, focusing on professionalism, transparency, and resolving issues to build trust rather than fuelling conflict. Remember your tone is what counts.
- **Empathise.** Start by acknowledging their feelings (e.g., “I understand your frustration...”) to show you’re listening and care.
- **Personalise.** Where appropriate, use their name and mention specifics from their post to show it’s not a generic, disingenuous response.

When writing a response

- **Don’t lead with the myth.** Say what it is, not what it isn’t. Focus your efforts on clearly stating the information or belief you do want people to take away. Keep it simple and memorable. The easier your point is to process and recall, the better.

Instead of: *“People often think that migrants are at the front of the queue for housing but that’s just not true.”*

- Try: *“We understand your frustrations X. The pressure on Scotland’s housing system has been caused by decades of underinvestment in social housing. The responsibility for that lies with government. We would love to be*

able to offer homes to everyone who needs one, but need to prioritise those most in need such as homeless and elderly people – you can find out how we do that here: X”

- Refer to policy and process. Demonstrate how decisions are made referring to allocation policies, legislation and legal duties. Use clear statistics to support posts.
- **Use explanation.** When we explain, it’s like showing our workings – it helps to lead people to the same conclusion rather than just expecting them to believe us. When people understand our point, they are far more likely to agree with it.

Key facts and figures

- In Scotland, housing for asylum seekers is primarily provided by the Home Office.
- International net migration to Scotland was around 48,000 in 2023. This is largely due to international students.
- Seeking asylum is not illegal. Anyone has the legal right to claim asylum.
- 250,000 people in Scotland are on waiting lists for a social home.

Draft social media response

Again, be sure to amend these to fit the situation, and personalise where you can.

‘I bet all of these homes you’re building are going to migrants’

The way we rent homes is open, clear and fair. Our homes are let to the people who need them most and doesn’t prioritise or discriminate against people based on where they’re from. Anyone aged 16 or over can get personalised and clear advice through our housing information, advice and letting service which you can find here.

‘I’ve been waiting for ages for a social home, migrants get to jump the queue’

I’m really sorry to hear that you’ve been waiting a long time. The demand for social housing is far greater than the number of homes we have available. We have a legal responsibility to let our homes for social rent to people considered to have the greatest housing need, which means we give reasonable preference to groups including homeless people and families in overcrowded homes.

The way we rent our homes is open, clear and fair and you can find out more about how we do that here [link to relevant part of your website].

If you’ve applied directly with us, please visit this page for more information [link to relevant part of your website].

‘We’re in a housing emergency and it’s because of migration’

When we have homes available to rent, our housing association provides homes for anyone who needs one. People who have settled in Scotland are not in any way prioritised for any social home because of their immigration status.

‘There aren’t any homes for Scots anymore because they’re all going to asylum seekers’

There’s a huge shortage of social homes; however this has been caused by decades of underinvestment by governments. Accommodation for asylum seekers is provided by the Home Office – we don’t allocate homes for rent in these cases.

Press queries

These need to be handled on a case-by-case basis, and case studies of what you’re doing in terms of community integration are always going to be the focus of a story if you have one available. The SFHA media team are more than happy to discuss these, direct contact details below. As a standard response to any generic query on this issue:

Before issuing your response, it is often worthwhile contacting the journalist or publication who made the original enquiry to ensure you are equipped with all the necessary information first.

Our housing association is a proud social justice organisation that exists to provide homes for anyone who needs one. People who have settled in Scotland are not in any way prioritised for a social home because of their immigration status.

The lack of homes is the cause of the housing emergency, not the people who need a home.

Our housing association has a legal responsibility to house people based on their overall housing need and this is reflected in our allocations policy which is open and transparent to all in need of social housing.

Contact

To discuss anything here in detail please get in touch: Jen Gracie, Public Affairs and Media Manager: jgracie@sfha.co.uk