

Thinking Relationally: A quick start guide

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Thinking Relationally: A quick start guide

This quick start guide gives retrofit teams the confidence to start 'thinking relationally'. Thinking relationally means working with people's emotions, social networks and life stages to craft more successful policy solutions. At the [Retrofit Policy Lab](#) we help policy teams approach people as relational as opposed to rational actors.

Our work on relational thinking helps put people's real lives at the centre of the policy process. This is particularly important now, as our city and regional governments are about to be put 'in the driving' seat of the UK Government's Warm Homes Plan. This will allow our local governments to create retrofit solutions for the communities they serve and is a key moment to overcome some of the challenges that have frustrated retrofit policy to date.

This guide helps retrofit teams move from 'one size fits all' approaches, which don't work, to 'several sizes fit most', which do. For retrofit teams wanting to experiment with relational thinking for the first time, we recommend six 'quick start' actions:

- 1. Decide you want to do it differently**
- 2. Get a guide**
- 3. Empathise with your users**
- 4. Define the problems you are really solving**
- 5. Encourage new ideas**
- 6. Plan the path to success**

These Quick Start actions can start a team thinking relationally in as little as two days. We know because we condensed four years of research into three two-day workshops with retrofit teams in Yorkshire Combined Authorities. We asked participants if their scope of retrofit policy had changed and whether they felt more confident in designing retrofit policy for people and place.' They told us:

"Definitely. The process has opened-up my way of thinking. I feel like I have a practical way to continue this new approach"

"Yes, absolutely, because we have been given approaches to consider the needs wishes and behaviours of people"

"Yes, in a short space of time we have been able to do a deep dive into a reluctant landlord persona and craft a scheme to target them."

A new way to deliver for people and place

Previous national government schemes have been criticised for failing to respond to the needs of local areas, allowing inadequate time and resources to build trust, and being too driven by targets like number of heat pumps installed or energy performance certificates improved^{1,2,3}. These problems lead to people simply refusing works, works failing and needed expensive action to put right, loss of trust and inefficient delivery, or a simple lack of engagement. We cannot repeat the same mistakes of national policy at the local level. [Read more about the problems of recent schemes here.](#)

Mayors in the driving seat

The newly announced Warm Homes Plan will: *“Put local mayors in the driving seat for rolling out home upgrades in their area, backing local leaders to deliver on behalf of their residents.”* Warm Homes Plan Press Release (2026)

With the announcement of the Warm Homes Plan⁴ the UK is about to see a large-scale programme of home energy improvements. This will include energy efficiency improvements, and new finance deals for solar and batteries, and heat pumps. Much of this will be delivered through our Mayoral, Combined and Strategic Authorities, our city regional governments.

The point of delivering the Government’s Warm Homes Plan locally is to ensure its rollout reflects the needs of people and place. With Mayors and local leaders in the driving seat, the responsibility for success shifts from Whitehall to our regions.

Adopting a relational approach can empower our local governments with the tools to build trust and engagement, to solve people’s real problems around energy and the home. The first step is deciding to do things differently.

¹ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2024, Process Evaluation of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF): Wave 1, available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67599a9b3bb681ccb0d346c4/shdf-evaluation-wave-1-process-report.pdf>

² Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2024, Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phases 1 & 2 Final Evaluation Report DESNZ Research Paper Number 2024/013, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-delivery-scheme-phases-1-and-2-evaluation>

³ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2025, Solid wall insulation installed under ECO4 and GBIS: Statistical audit results, November 2025, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/solid-wall-insulation-installed-under-eco4-and-gbis-statistical-audit-results>

⁴ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2026, Warm Homes Plan, Press Release: Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/families-to-save-in-biggest-home-upgrade-plan-in-british-history>

Step 1: Decide you want to do it differently

"We need to think differently. Schemes are not landing effectively. It's insanity to keep repeating the same problem." Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025

Few are satisfied with the timescales and design of past retrofit policy. It was overly prescriptive, competitively allocated, stop-start funded, and painful for delivery teams:

"It hurts to deliver on government timescales. It's restrictive, the staff feel the stress and it genuinely hurts. We've just got to deliver, we've just got to spend and spend faster, we can't have time to do it right." Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025

While a new approach is needed, a relational perspective won't change the need to deliver a step change in home decarbonisation. We do need to deliver a significant increase in building energy performance, we do need to accelerate heat pump installs, and we do need to deploy solar and batteries to make a more flexible energy system. It is not that these performance indicators and pressing timescales will go away, it is that there is more than one way to deliver them.

To date retrofit policy has assumed that people are 'rational' actors and the barrier to uptake is better finance and more grants. Instead, our research shows that peoples' relationships with their home are more emotional. The types of money they will use for retrofit, the moral economy of debt, who they trust with their home, their life stage and other priorities, all shape the process^{5,6,7}.

We are writing a quick start guide because *doing* something new with your team is going to be easier than getting people to read a lot of new social theory[!] If you want the deep work that goes with this approach you can access a summary of our research findings [here](#) or a [chatbot](#) which answers questions about our work directly.

Taking a relational approach means engaging with peoples' emotional decisions about the home. Bringing emotional decision-making into the technical field of energy efficiency retrofit can be done using some simple tools to begin the journey. We recommend starting by getting a guide.

⁵ Zelizer, V.A., 2021. *The social meaning of money: Pin money, paychecks, poor relief, and other currencies*. Princeton University Press.

⁶ Hall, S., Owen, A., Middlemiss, L., Davis, M. and Bookbinder, R., 2025. Mission Led government or Radical Incrementalism for electricity and Net Zero? *Journal of the British Academy*, 13(1).

⁷ Davis, M., Middlemiss, L., Hall, S., Brown, D., Bookbinder, R., Owen, A., Brisbois, M.C., Mininni, G.M., Cairns, I. and Hannon, M., 2025. Towards a relational sociology of retrofit. *Sociology*, 59(3), pp.466-484.

Step 2: Get a guide

*“[The facilitator] constantly brought us back to thinking about the individual and their needs, because your idea may be great on paper, **but people do not think rationally**, people cantered policy development is new to me and something I'll take forward. **I've worked in policy for a decade.**”* Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

Relational thinking is new to many policy professionals, so it is important to find a guide. Our academic team partnered [with Lighthouse Policy Design](#) to create Retrofit Policy Lab, a collaboration between relational social scientists who centre emotion and social relations, and design thinkers who bring perspectives from policy design which also starts from real user needs and lived experience⁸. We borrowed some methods from ‘design sprints’ which get teams thinking of how users experience different policies and products. Getting a facilitator familiar with relational approaches and design thinking is helpful for three reasons:

1. **Experienced facilitators ask the right questions** – they will keep you focussed on a relational framing and can identify biases towards rational policy mindsets.
2. **An external guide is impartial** – they are not connected to previous successes or failures and can bring new perspectives.
3. **Facilitation is a skill** – Facilitators must provoke, mediate, encourage and question teams. They must be able to re-orient and re frame ideas and contributions in a productive and safe environment⁸

In our three workshops with Yorkshire authorities the value of external facilitation was clear:

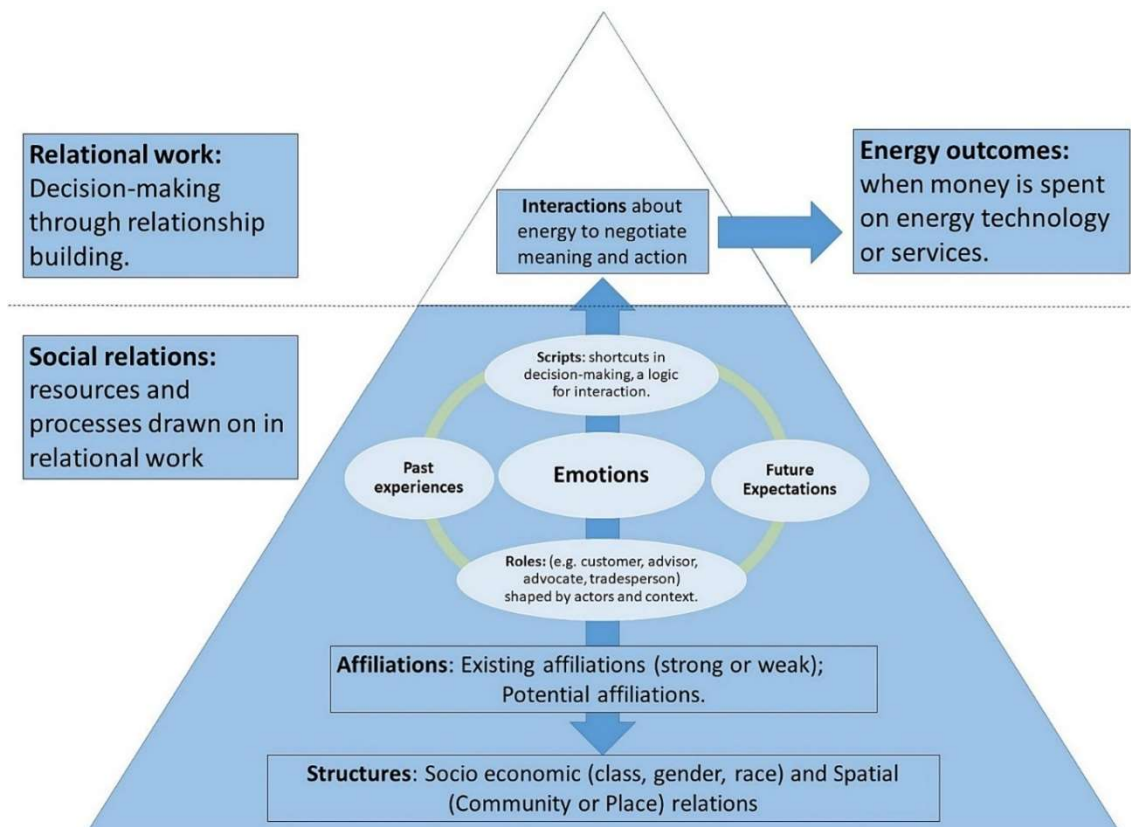
*“Putting ourselves into the shoes of different persons has been extremely useful to understand and appreciate why people refuse or are reluctant to engage. **Removing the usual corporate constraint has been very refreshing.**”* Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025

One participant said facilitated experience meant they were... *“much more confident, reassured that the design sprint works and approach are standard product design. If product manufacturers can get benefit from these tests why can't we”* Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

At [Retrofit Policy Lab](#) we recommend getting a guide familiar with relational thinking and understanding the emotional and social drivers behind people's behaviours. In our deeper methodological guide to relational approaches to

⁸ Mosely, G., Markauskaite, L. and Wrigley, C., 2021. Design facilitation: A critical review of conceptualisations and constructs. *Thinking skills and creativity*, 42, p.100962.

energy⁹ we centralise emotions shaped by multiple factors such as societal structures, affiliations, past experiences, future expectations, scripts and roles. Each of these play a part in how we interact with energy and energy policy. They are, however, unfamiliar to much of the policy development space. In the MCS Foundation funded workshops that underpinned this guide we wanted to explore methods that centralise emotion in policy development. We have found methods that centre empathy as a critical starting point for thinking relationally.



Step 3: Empathise with your users

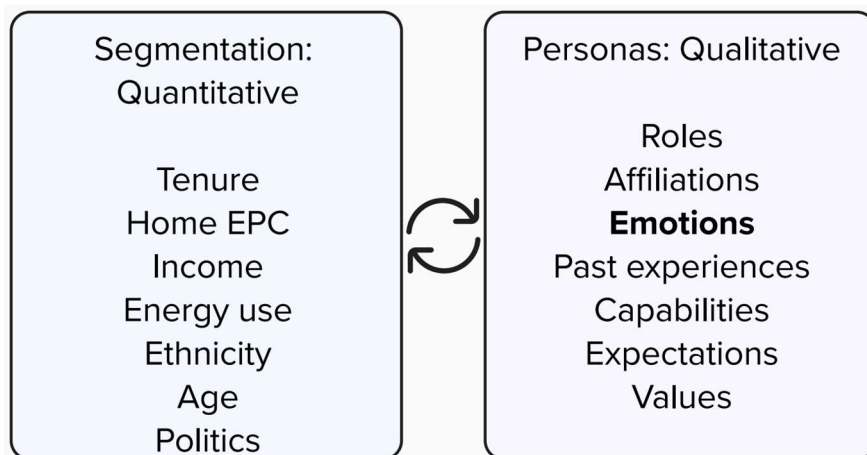
Starting from empathy is unfamiliar to the policy process but it is a skill we all have. The ability to ask *'how does this person feel about this'* is something we do every day. However, in policymaking we have been trained to assume people act rationally, they are able to compute all the different options and go with attractive policy offers. From this perspective we could expect people to enthusiastically accept home decarbonisation options that make financial sense on a spreadsheet.

⁹ Middlemiss, L., Davis, M., Brown, D., Bookbinder, R., Cairns, I., Mininni, G.M., Brisbois, M.C., Hannon, M., Owen, A. and Hall, S., 2024. Developing a relational approach to energy demand: A methodological and conceptual guide. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 110, p.103441.

We have designed emotion out of the policy process. Thinking relationally brings it back in.

Finding your users with segmentation and personas

We need to *start* our empathy process by identifying the types of people whose relational worlds we want to understand. It is no good saying 'everyone' because a small private landlord in Barnsley has a very different relational world to a retiring homeowner in Bradford. A busy single mum in Whitby will engage differently to a couple in a council home in Wakefield. Thinking relationally means we need to know the types of relational world we want to work with. For this we need two tools, segmentation and personas:



Segmentation and Persona development are iterative. In our work with Yorkshire authorities, we found most teams have some segmentation data, but had rarely worked with personas. [Retrofit Policy Lab](#) created nine 'proto personas' based on deep research on people's relations to retrofit policy:



Meet Wendy. Wendy is a 42-year-old self-employed mother living in a heritage semi-detached home in Whitby, North Yorkshire. You can find out more about Wendy and chat to her AI Persona Bot here:

<https://www.retrofitpolicylab.uk/personas/wendy/chat>



Leah and Dan

Homeowner

The Growing Family Planners

Meet Leah and Dan. Leah and Dan are a couple in their early thirties who have just bought their first home in Nottingham, a 1930s semi in need of some work. You can find out more about Leah and Dan and chat to their AI Persona Bot here:

<https://www.retrofitpolicylab.uk/personas/leah-and-dan/chat>



Graham

Landlord

The Reluctant Landlord

Meet Graham. Graham is a 58-year-old self-employed tradesman who owns two rental properties in a low-income part of the West Midlands. You can find out more about Graham and chat to his AI Persona Bot here:

<https://www.retrofitpolicylab.uk/personas/graham/chat>

There are six other retrofit personas on the Retrofit Policy Lab site covering tenants, retiring homeowners, 'empty nesters' and more. Find them here:

<https://www.retrofitpolicylab.uk/personas>

We used personas like these to improve segmentation targeting and vice versa. If we want to target policies to low-income renters, we need to understand the world's Grahams and we also need to understand lower income renters in a region who reflect another one of our personas, Amira:



Amira

Tenant

The Powerless Tenant

Meet Amira. Amira is a 29-year-old mother of two living in a privately rented, poorly insulated home. Chat to Amira's AI persona bot here:

<https://www.retrofitpolicylab.uk/personas/amira/chat>

Segmentation can then be used to understand how many people in a region are in similar positions to Amira. Our colleagues at the University of Leeds used the Living Costs and Food Survey to segment low-income tenants in South Yorkshire. They found Most 'Hard Pressed Tenants', the region's lowest income group, live in social housing (80%), indicating some success in targeting need.

The segmentation also highlighted a high share of 'Low Income Commuters' in Barnsley (22%), reflecting younger people being priced out of Sheffield. Apart from 'Working Families' (just under 40% in social housing), most low to mid income groups rent privately (around 70%).

We can then use the pen portraits of the different segments to understand how many people our relational exercise is targeting, and the persona bots to move us to the next stage of policy design, empathising with a defined user group using empathy mapping.

Pen-portraits of key tenant groups (w/ stats)

	OAC	Label	Description	Geography
	4A	Working families	83% family & mature working age, 47% couple w/ children; 53% single & couple adult-only households, £316 avg. weekly income, higher avg. utilities spend share, 60% private rented, 72% urban location	Doncaster (13%, c. 3.7k households), Sheffield (9%, c. 5.5k households)
	5A	Low-to-mid income early-careers	Over half (59%) are under 25's and early-career age, 67% single/couple adult-only households, £400 avg. weekly income, lower avg. utilities spend share, highest share private rented (85%), 68% urban location	Sheffield (10.8%, c. 6.5k households), Barnsley (10.3%, c. 2.3k households)
	6B	Low-income empty-nesters	45% pre-retirement, 26% mature-working age, 86% single/couple adult-only households, £341 avg. weekly income, slightly higher avg. utilities spend share, 72% private rented, over-half rural (53%)	Rotherham (15%, c. 3.3k households), Doncaster (13%, c. 3.8k households)
	8A	Low-income commuters	43% family age; 30% road to retirement, 43% couple w/o children; 35% w/ children, £360 avg. weekly income, lower avg. utilities spend share; higher avg. transport share, 66% private rented, 100% urban	Barnsley (22%, c. 4.9k households), Doncaster (12%, c. 3.5k households), Rotherham (11%, c. 2.4k households)
	8D	Hard-pressed tenants	Mixed bag – higher % single mum household & possibly multi-gen families, lowest income - £248 avg. weekly, higher avg. housing spend share, urban, mostly (85%) social rent	Doncaster (13%, c. 3.7k households), Sheffield (12%, c. 7k households), Rotherham (11%, c. 2.3k households)

This contribution is funded by:



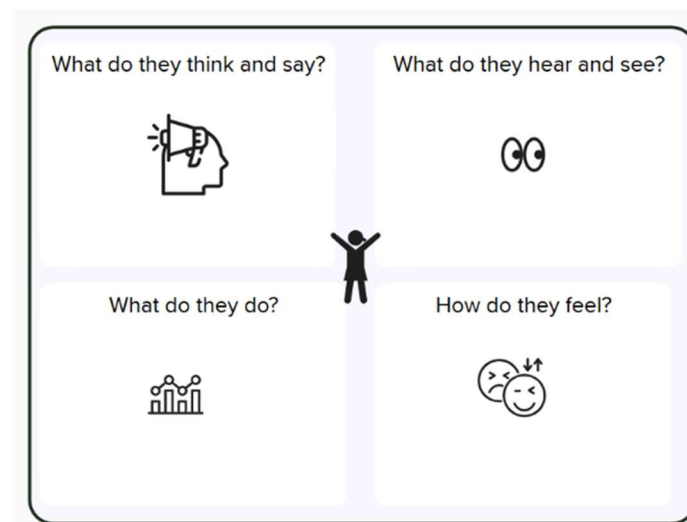
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Empathise with Empathy Mapping

Empathy mapping is a simple exercise everyone can do and will get better at with practise. It involves constructing a 4 square grid with a persona in the centre and asking four questions.

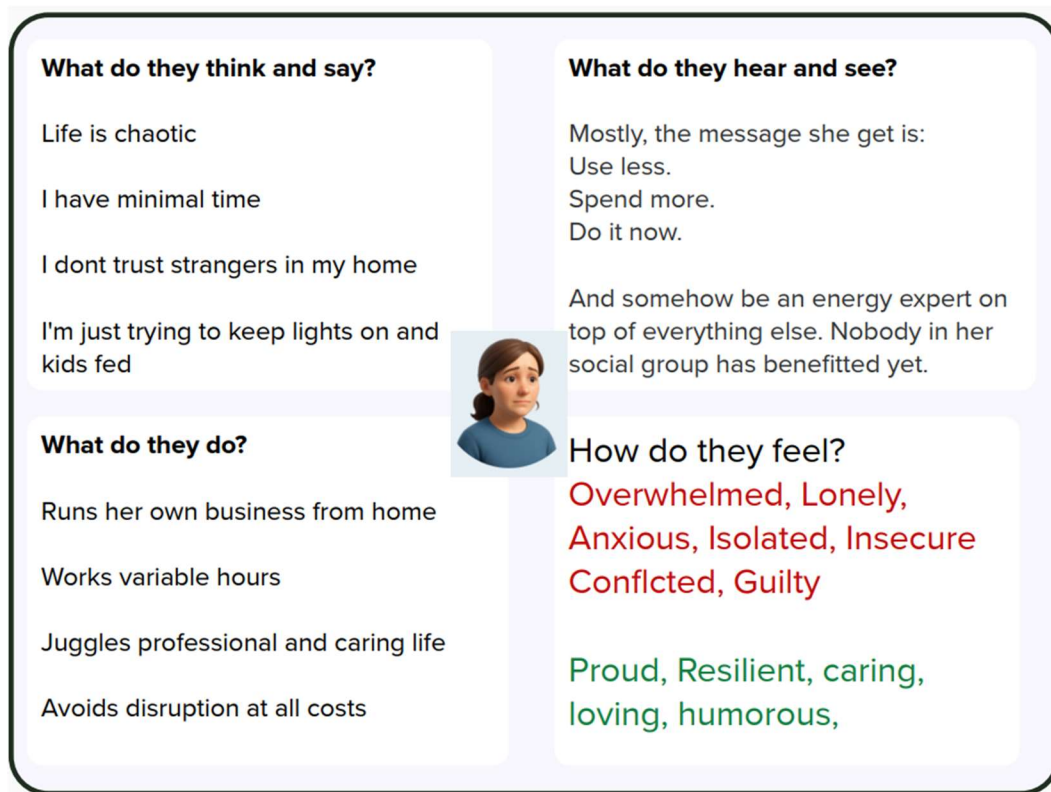
1. **What do they do?** Which can be determined by their observable behaviour.
2. **What do they think and say?** Which can be determined by consultation.
3. **What do they hear and see?** Which can be determined by consultation and social media/media analysis; and then critically
4. **How do they feel?** Which can sometimes be determined by asking them, but can also be determined using empathy.

People will often not reveal how they feel about a particular question, purchase or opportunity. They may be unclear themselves how they feel or unlikely to tell the truth in an interview with a stranger. A relational approach starts from exploring how people really feel because emotions drive and shape our behaviours, including what we buy, what money we pay with, whether we will engage with a policy or ignore it. An example blank empathy map is shown below.



Because we are presenting a 'quick start' guide, and our persona bots draw on real interviews, we are confident using them to help retrofit teams experience a relational approach. But here is a critical disclaimer, never go further than step six before speaking to real people, there is no substitute for regular and consistent contact with users, this should form an early stage of Step 6: Plan the path to success.

As we shall see however, our teams from the three Yorkshire Combined Authorities found the empathy mapping exercise the most transformative element of the entire experience. Here is an example empathy map created for Wendy:



We asked: 'what moments or activities today challenged your usual way of thinking about retrofit policy?' Our local authority participants told us:

"Persona chats and empathy, the empathy mapping exercise really helped put us in Wendy's shoes." Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

"Thinking about the way we speak to people the approach we take and talking about retrofit, the empathy mapping was powerful." Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

"...seeing how empathy plays a role in policymaking and how Liberals, making liberal minded policy doesn't work for Graham [...] I have spoken to Graham before, and this time, I was able to take a completely different approach with him." Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

"We usually apply our qualitative empathy-based insights to our engagement approaches but now it feels like a more effective step to embed them in how we design the schemes and policy measures we are hoping to embed them within." Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

Something anyone can do in one hour is sit with one of the chatbots and their own policy questions and create an empathy map. What sometimes happens in

a workshop setting is a reticence to fully commit to the 'how do they feel' category. It is critical to name each emotion that an empathy exercises surfaces, because this is the basis of Step 4, really understanding the problem you need to solve for your users.

Step 4: Define the problem you are really solving

Once retrofit delivery teams have created Empathy Maps the objectives of retrofit policy start to shift. Policy and delivery teams de-prioritise rationalised administratively consistent policy, and instead seek to solve Wendy's real problems, or Grahams, or Amira's or Leah and Dan's. They then start to design new policy based on these needs. They create solutions balancing administrative KPIs *and* the emotional worlds of target personas and segments.

This is the critical role relational thinking can play in enabling mayoral and combined authorities to thrive in the delivery of the Warm Homes Plan.

In the workshops, the three problems we defined were:

1. For the private rented sector small private landlords need to feel supported, valued and enabled to make changes to rental properties. Landlords are used to local authorities being an enforcement agency. Rather than rely on regulatory and enforcement action, we need to encourage and support small private landlords to begin a positive home energy journey with their local governments, starting small and making tenant's lives better at each stage of the way.
2. Households like Wendy's and Leah and Dan's are in the 'missing middle' of retrofit policy, not affluent enough to self-fund measures and not qualifying for income or benefits linked support. They also will not go on a deep retrofit journey because of family commitments and issues trusting the process. We need retrofit options for these time poor, missing middle homes which might culminate in deeper work but cannot start there. What smaller, positive interventions can we build to get them ready for and comfortable with deeper retrofit when it does suit them?
3. When local authorities are delivering area-based schemes in lower income neighbourhoods they encounter social housing, private tenants, and owner-occupiers. For the owner-occupier in the missing middle to benefit from these schemes they often need to part fund measures. How can we create positive relationships around home energy so their first experience of 'us' is not, 'please find £15k for an unfamiliar process'? What packages can we develop for them to spread the cost without increasing personal debt, i.e. keeping the payments linked to the home? For social tenants, how

can refusal rates be reduced by attending to the real reasons people say 'no' to funded measures?

In each case the problem statement has changed to accommodate the emotional world of the user. It allowed policy and delivery teams to speak about their own experiences of refusal and disengagement. This opens the space for creative solutions because it does not always need more finance and grants. Instead, creativity and emotional resonance are the priority.

Step 5: Make space for new ideas

Once a team understands the segment they want to solve for and has used personas to create an empathy map for people in that segment, the usual practice is to gather deeper qualitative data from real people. In a 'quick start' scenario like this, the next step is to explore what new policy ideas might emerge. Another method we have borrowed from design sprints is hosting a rapid ideation session. In these short creative 'bursts' the objective is to design solutions that 'flip' negative emotions to positive ones, or to build on existing positive emotions.

If you want to experiment with these methods before getting a guide, you can use free online tools to structure the session. Good examples are Individual Brainstorming, Worst Possible Idea, Idea Sketching, Crazy 8s, SCAMPER method and Storyboarding. What matters more than the method you choose is the safe space that is created to share ideas at pace, volume is more important than quality at this stage.

"This was far more successful. Being asked to think, without limits or restraints, as a policy person is something I never do. It was challenging, but ended up having lots of ideas." Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

"I am inspired and enthused by the idea we can do more with 'less' – i.e. without capital funded grants there are more powerful and less resource intensive things we can do." Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

"Allowed us to think outside of the box not be constrained because we can't do that". Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

By taking a relational approach to our 'Wendy's and 'Leah and Dan's' the ideation sessions focussed on how to engage busy families with young children in a way that was low initial effort and designed to make family life easier. Here is an example of one of the ideas generated:

Handy Home Evenings: – an ‘energy aligned’ solution for missing middle.	Stage	Emotional need	What do we need to know/do next
Wendy’s and Leah’s and Dan’s can attend evening or late afternoon group classes designed to land positively in family life and make things easier for them. This would be a series of e.g. 10x evening classes over 10 weeks which included simple topics such as: bleeding radiators and getting the best out of the boiler, draught proofing, thermal imaging, and other non-energy aligned topics like home and fire safety, dealing with damp or mould, hanging doors, unsticking windows etc. The solution MUST have top quality childcare (baking, art, yoga etc) almost as the main selling point and include a hot meal at a low price i.e. pie and peas, stew and a roll. Includes meeting local trades.	First Engagement	Personal agency over the home reduces fear and stress , group dynamic reduces loneliness isolation . Childcare solution reduces overwhelm . Builds Trust	Pilot needed to test user desirability and response. A low resource, high engagement tool which could act as a first step for further measures. How can further measures such as an electrification bundle build on group engagements?

Let’s see what Wendy had to say about the idea:



“Now that... actually sounds like it was designed by someone who’s met an actual parent. I’d be way more up for that than another “save the planet” lecture in a draughty hall with a PowerPoint and a biscuit that tastes like cardboard. You’ve basically hit the magic combo: Kids looked after and doing something nice, I don’t have to cook or wash up, And I might actually learn something useful that saves me hassle and money.

That's not an "energy course", that's "Tuesday night where I don't lose my mind". Stuff like bleeding radiators, getting the most out of the boiler, dealing with damp, sticking doors and windows – that's my life. That's the stuff that ruins a day. I don't wake up thinking, "How can I improve the EPC rating of my 19th-century stone heat sieve?" I wake up thinking, "Why is that window stuck again and why does the bathroom smell vaguely of pond?"

Meeting trusted local trades there is a big plus as well. If I can see them in person, have a natter, see they're not a cowboy, and maybe book something in without spending three weeks chasing people who never ring back – brilliant. I'd remember the faces too, which helps when you're deciding who to let into your house."

Wendy is an AI chatbot designed to respond like an overburdened single parent juggling work and childcare in a draughty home on a variable income. She is not a real person. The feedback from an AI bot is not user feedback. However, as an introduction to the relational thinking she provides a space for policy creation and delivery teams to create and playfully explore how different policy ideas land in her relational world. Each of the policy teams involved in the research also had their own experiences to draw on and could reflect where they had heard similar messages before.

"loved being challenged to brainstorm ideas of change, loved stepping into Wendy's shoes" Source – Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

"I think the ambition to address how landlords feel could be a much more dramatic change of approach than simply the idea of "incentivising" landlords. In many ways this is all new ground because the narrative around private landlords is so negative and the attitudes of my former colleagues in enforcement are so far removed from gaining rewards and making landlords feel good." Local Gvt Research Participant, 2025.

Once retrofit policy and delivery teams have engaged with relational approaches it is hard to go back to rational actor policy making because of the space for experimentation and new approaches it opens-up. To repeat an earlier quote: *"We need to think differently. Schemes are not landing effectively. It's insanity to keep repeating the same problem."*

These first five steps are designed to add a new perspective to policy making around home energy retrofit. With the new perspective gained new tools become available and viable in the policy process. Our academic team partnered with Lighthouse Policy Design to create the Retrofit Policy Lab because we believe policy design is a powerful next step in the journey from relational thinking to genuinely innovative people led policy compatible with localised delivery of the Warm Homes Plan.

Step 6: Plan the path to success.

Once there is an appetite in retrofit teams for a different model of delivery shaped by relational thinking the next step is to embark on a more formalised 'policy design' process. This means taking stock of what is needed to understand users and planning to develop experiments to test and validate new ideas before launching them fully formed into the world.

Re-discovery

Now our assumptions about people and policy have changed, we need to go back and formalise our understanding around new insights. Where in your organisation has user centred design been used before? What can colleagues and partners tell you about past successes? Can you generate new insights on past retrofit delivery based on these new perspectives?

Definition & Mapping

Who are you going to target with retrofit delivery? We can develop a fuller and statistically validated view of the types of population we want to target with policy design for retrofit. By focussing on a specific set of personas we can map their journey through retrofit policy and determine where they struggle, and what solutions can be designed with them.

User needs: Based on the gaps found in those journeys, we define the specific requirements the user has to achieving their goals. This can also apply beyond our householders and landlords. We can identify users in our delivery contractors, relationships with central government and with supply side partners like skills trainers and trades associations.

Ideation & Validation

Ideation prioritisation: Once an ideation session has started to develop creative responses to retrofit policy, these ideas need to be developed into a matrix of options which show the relation between impact, risk and resources of different solutions. This will help prioritise ideas which can become prototypes for experimentation.

Hypotheses: Ideas for solving different user problems need to be transformed into testable statements. An example testable hypothesis drawing on the above might be: *"If we run 10x Home Energy Evenings aimed at missing middle families, then we will engage more young families with middle incomes on positive retrofit journeys than if we had not designed for family life. This will happen because the emotional pressures of family life 'crowd out' even low effort activity like understanding the energy behaviours of the home."*

Experiments: We design lean ways to test those hypotheses with users, from simple choice experiments to co-design to ensure we build the right thing before committing to full development.

Moving to pilots: All this activity happens before new policy ideas are piloted because they move us to a higher level of confidence that spending significant levels of public money will *work* for the numbers of people we need it to work for.

Pilots work with samples of the target population to work out and finesse the solution. They gather real world data on likely success and uptake to support the business cases needed to shift public resources into new forms of delivery.

Relational thinking can be a launchpad for a new perspective on policy development for decarbonising homes. It is based on a different conception of human decision making which result in emotionally driven interactions around energy. Once armed with this new perspective there is a formalised and replicable method of bringing it into the real-world using policy design.

Conclusion

The path to success in people and place led retrofit delivery over the coming years will be defined Mayoral and Combined Authorities' ability to design around real user needs. This six-step guide describes a realistic introduction to thinking relationally around the people and communities we are making policy *for*. It allows retrofit delivery and policy teams to get a feel for how relational thinking works using the Retrofit Policy Lab tools.

These tools have been developed to help shift our thinking towards creative solutions to retrofit policy which can then be complemented by a fuller policy design process. These approaches have the potential to deliver the step change needed in the pace and scale of home decarbonisation and to make sure more people can access retrofit journeys that suit real needs.

What next?

Speak to the [Retrofit Policy Lab](#) team about bringing relational insights to your work on energy and the home. Making a start on a relational retrofit journey can unlock a new perspective which can transform your delivery options.

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