



# Talking About Community Justice

## Framing Toolkit

February 2022



# Welcome to the Talking about community justice Framing toolkit

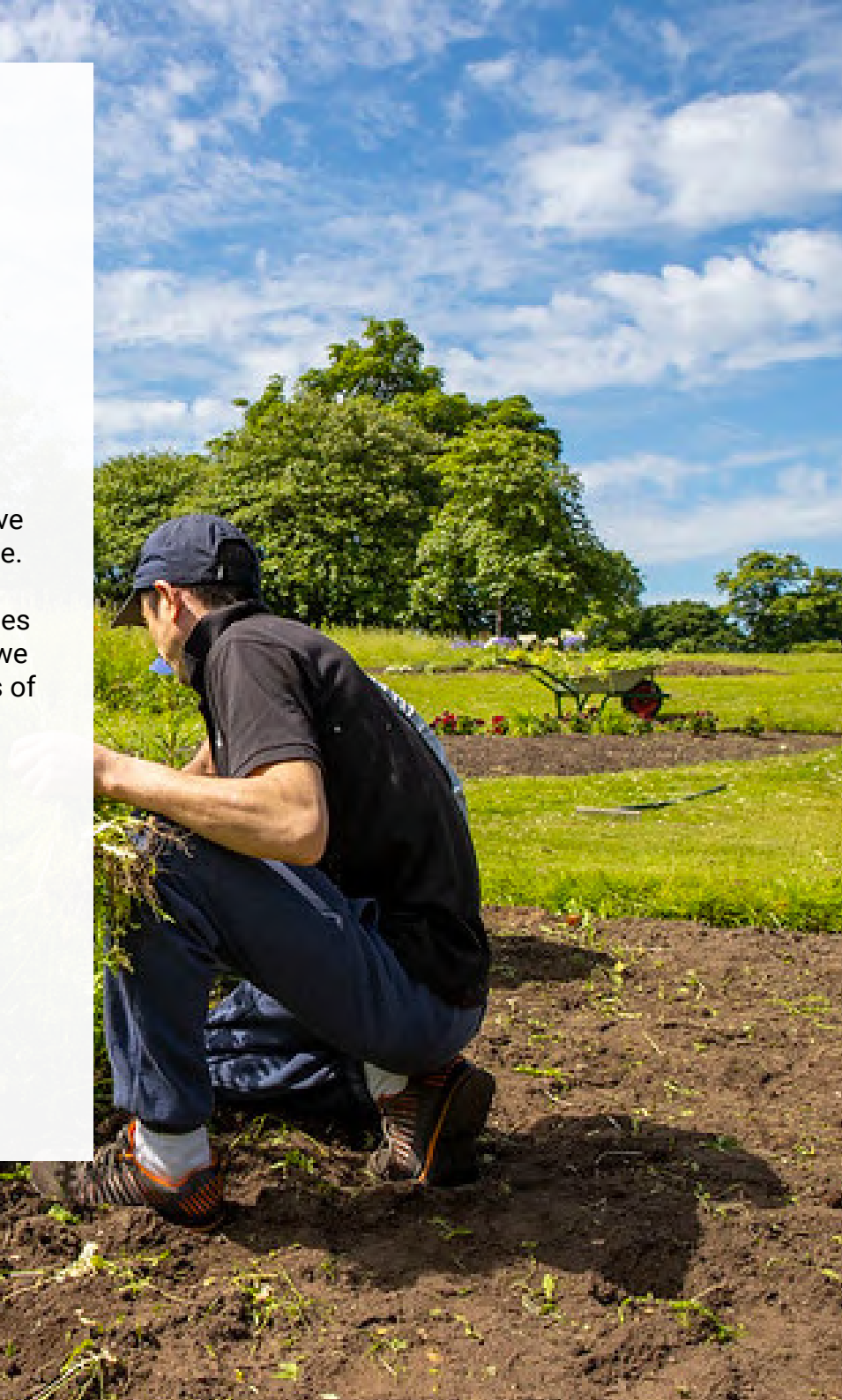
## What is framing?

*Don't think of an elephant* - what are you thinking of? The chances are you now have an image of an elephant in your head. Every word and every phrase evokes a frame.

Framing means using evidence to make deliberate choices in the words and images we use to talk about community justice. Choices about: what to explain and how we go about that. For our audience, these choices can lead to radically different ways of thinking.

## Toolkit contents

- The importance of framing community justice
- **Who** are we talking to?
- General guidance on **how** we communicate
- The narrative structure
- The community justice narrative - how can we frame community justice?



# The importance of framing community justice

This framing toolkit is designed to help everyone working in the sector talk about community justice in a consistent, easy to understand way that gets across its benefits and value to all.

It's essential for communications about community justice to be consistent and clear because:

- It is often asked – what is community justice? This is usually answered differently, there is no cohesive community justice narrative that is widely shared.
- Research shows that the Scottish public have minimal awareness of the term community justice. Consequently, they have little understanding of what it is. Often it is a one-dimensional view, for example unpaid work initiatives such as litter picking.
- Unfortunately, information gaps and vacuums are often filled with myths, misperceptions and divided views. This toolkit enables us to shape a more positive, informed articulation of what community justice is all about.
- People won't support and evangelise about something they don't understand fully. To motivate support and advocacy for community justice, we must provide a compelling explanation of what it is, how it works and what it achieves.

This toolkit will help us to consistently convey a cohesive, positive and credible community justice narrative in an accessible and convincing way.

The recommendations in this toolkit are based on extensive research, incorporating a review of existing research, in-depth interviews and workshops with experts in the field, as well as quantitative and qualitative public testing.

# Who are we talking to?

The immediate audience is **stakeholders**.

This toolkit is a guide for experts and practitioners working within the Scottish justice sector, and other relevant sectors, who communicate with:

- people navigating the justice system
- service providers
- local and national Government
- the media
- members of the public

There is not currently a shared, consistent definition of community justice across all stakeholders, which contributes to a lack of understanding and confusion amongst the general public. We hope this toolkit will help everyone sing from the same sheet.



The ultimate audience is **the general public in Scotland**.

Research\* has found that public understanding is very low - 70% of the Scottish public do not know what community justice is.

Furthermore, the majority of the Scottish public (aged 18+) are not aware about the benefits that community justice delivers for Scotland whether in terms of fewer victims, changing the pattern of people offending or transforming the lives of both individuals and their communities.

The evidence suggests that we need a simple, accessible explanation of what community justice is and the benefits it offers. We can then build on this foundation over time to shift attitudes and increase support for community justice as an approach.



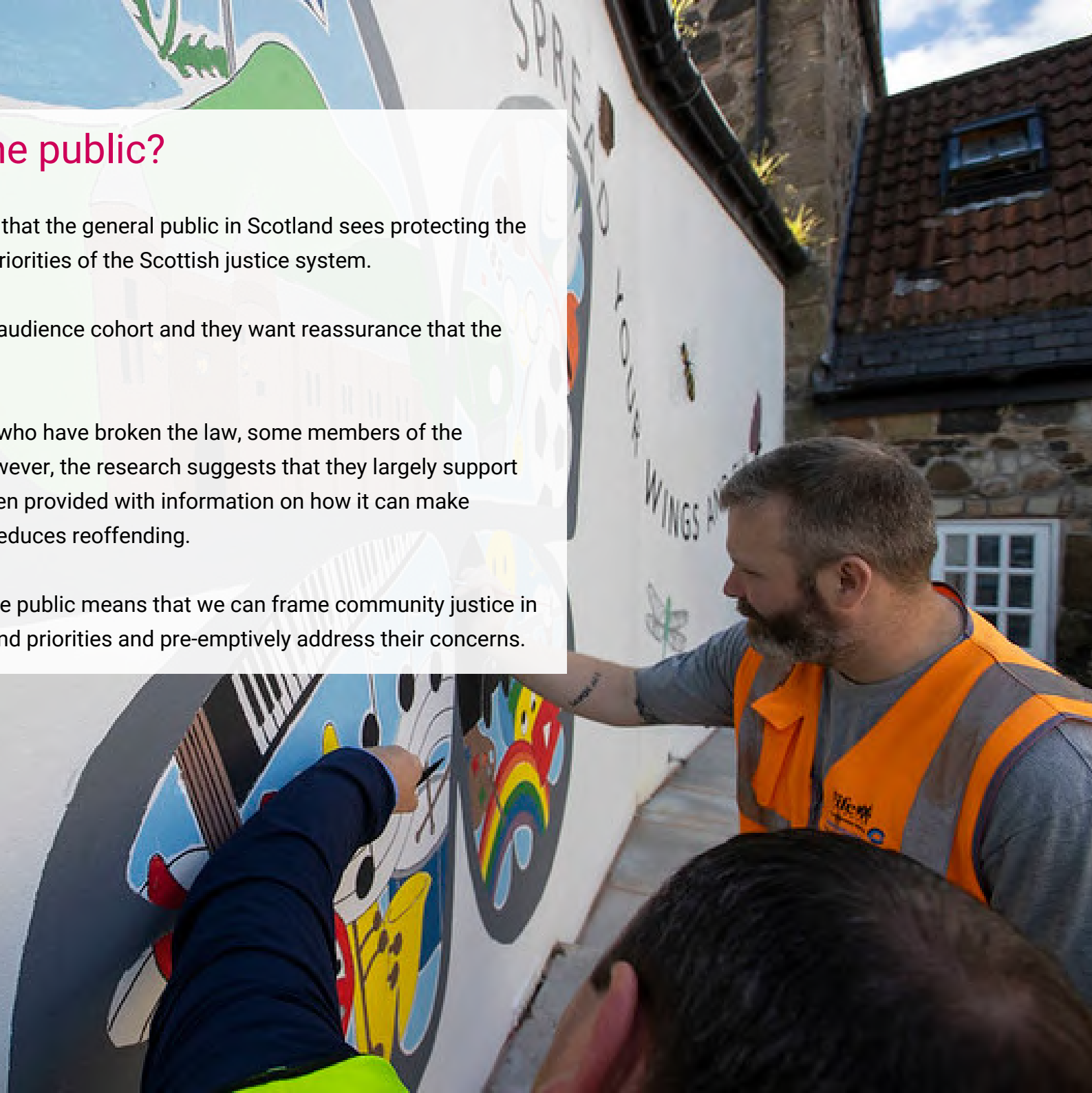
## What matters to the public?

The evidence base demonstrates that the general public in Scotland sees protecting the public and accountability as the priorities of the Scottish justice system.

Fairness is very important to this audience cohort and they want reassurance that the victim is being considered.

When it comes to helping people who have broken the law, some members of the Scottish public lack empathy. However, the research suggests that they largely support the idea of community justice when provided with information on how it can make Scottish communities safer and reduces reoffending.

Understanding what matters to the public means that we can frame community justice in a way that aligns to their values and priorities and pre-emptively address their concerns.



# General guidance on **how** we communicate

We talk later about what we should say. Let's start by looking at some clear rules about how we should frame a convincing articulation of community justice. Based on our research, there are five key principles for communicators to keep in mind to help get our message across.

Together, by using these principles to inform our public communications, we can have more impact – and help increase public understanding.





## 1. Substantiation not generalisation: back with facts

To embed understanding, our messages must be credible and believable. Sweeping, general statements lacking factual support will be met with doubt and scepticism. As much as possible, we need evidence-based, tangible messages.

This is especially so when it comes to statements about the effectiveness of community justice. Without evidence, these can seem like overclaim.

It also applies to statements about the life circumstances which may lead to a person breaking the law. Without these facts, these statements can be interpreted as stereotypes or inaccurate generalisations.



	Don't say: "Many people who break the law suffered early childhood trauma"
	Do say: "6/10 people who..."

## 2. Get the balance right: community and victim first

To reassure communities and make them feel that community justice helps them be safer, the communication emphasis should be on the community and the victim. Research shows that the public resist a narrative about community justice which leads with, or is too focused on, the person who has broken the law.

This is because "fairness" and the idea of "accountability" is important to the public.

First and foremost, they want to know how the community and victim have benefitted.

	Don't say: "Community justice is an empathetic way of dealing with people who commit crime."
	Do say: "The evidence shows community justice can help people stop breaking the law again leading to fewer victims and safer communities."

### 3. Everyday language not buzzwords

Every sector has its own language, but sometimes we need reminding that the way we speak to each other within our sector is not the way most people communicate. The public spot jargon very easily, and reject it.

Let's keep the language everyday and simple.

Until people have a firm grasp of what community justice means, we need to avoid language that sounds too much like we are making a sales pitch.



Try to avoid the use of acronyms such as CPO or EM. Use Community Payback Order and Electronic Monitoring, where possible.

### 4. Be wary of metaphors and similes

Our audience lack understanding and we have a long way to go to build it. Let's start with keeping it simple.

Metaphors can be evocative, but they can invite subjectivity rather than help make understanding clear and immediate.

For example, contextualising community justice in public health terms is too far removed for people who lack basic understanding. The research indicates that the Scottish public found this comparison jargonistic.



Don't say that criminal behaviour is something which "spreads" or "infects" a community.



## 5. Build on what people are willing to believe

Even if we don't know about something, we make assumptions, positive or negative, based on what is presented to us. The words "community" and "justice" naturally inform some viewpoint about what community justice could mean.

Our willingness to accept information presented to us is influenced by what we know and believe generally. For example, people are likely to believe that working in collaboration to solve complex problems is better than trying to do everything yourself.

Our community justice narrative will resonate more deeply if the information we harness ties in naturally with what people readily accept.



Do say: "Community justice involves local and national organisations working together."

## Our narrative structure

- What is community justice?
- What does it involve?
- How does it benefit communities?



## What is community justice?

➔ *Community justice is where people who have broken the law are held to account and supported to reconnect and contribute to their communities.*

### Why should we express it this way?

- People want to feel that, whatever the crime, people are held to account for their actions.
- “People who have broken the law” avoids stigmatising language while maintaining clarity.
- The word “contribute” frames this benefit to communities in positive, constructive terms.

## What does it involve?

➔ *Where it is safe to do so, people who commit certain crimes receive community-based sentences. This can include treatment for underlying issues such as drug or alcohol addiction, unpaid work, fines and compensation or restrictions of liberty such as electronic monitoring and curfews.*

### Why should we express it this way?

- People want a 'dictionary definition' of community justice which explains what it involves in practical, specific terms.
- People want reassurance that public safety is a key consideration and that sentences are only given when it's appropriate to the person and crime committed.
- People tend to think community justice means unpaid work and are not aware of other elements e.g. electronic monitoring.
- It makes it clear that community justice is not a 'softer option'. People want reassurance that people who break the law make amends for their actions.

## How does it benefit communities?

➔ *The evidence shows community justice can help people stop breaking the law again leading to fewer victims and safer communities.*

### Why should we express it this way?

- It frames the benefits to the person who has broken the law in terms of the benefit to victims and the community, which is more important in the eyes of the public.
- It explains that the effectiveness of community justice is backed up by evidence. In practice, this statement should be supported by specific facts and figures, for example: *The Scottish Government's latest reconviction data (published: 6 Oct 2020) shows that 40 per cent of those released from prison were reconvicted within a year. Of those who had been given sentences of less than one year, 49 per cent were reconvicted within a year. In comparison reconviction rates for community sentences were much lower, 30 per cent down from 32 per cent the year before.*

## How can we frame community justice?

We can dislodge people's assumptions about community justice with a narrative framed to highlight the information that they want to know upfront: what it is, how it works and what it achieves. Like this:

Community justice is where people who have broken the law are held to account and supported to reconnect and contribute to their communities.

Where it is safe to do so, people who commit certain crimes receive community-based sentences. This can include treatment for underlying issues such as drug or alcohol addiction, unpaid work, fines and compensation or restrictions of liberty such as electronic tagging and curfews.

The evidence shows community justice can help people stop breaking the law again leading to fewer victims and safer communities.

# Together we can change the conversation about justice

We encourage you to embed the guidance and narrative outlined in this toolkit wherever you can, and also to share it with your colleagues.

There is always more to learn about how to frame an issue. So, as the public-facing conversation on community justice continues to develop, the way we communicate will evolve, and we will continue to add to this toolkit.

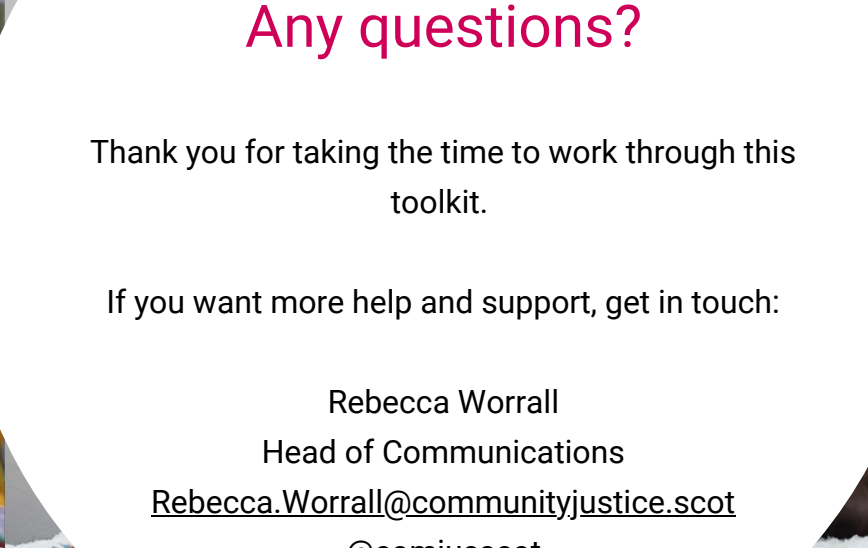
Your own perspective is vital. We are keen to hear about your experiences of using this toolkit and its impact, as well as any ideas on what tools or advice would be useful for you.

Let us know: [Rebecca.Worrall@communityjustice.scot](mailto:Rebecca.Worrall@communityjustice.scot)

## Framing checklist

When you start on a piece of public-facing communications activity, think framing! Use this checklist to plan and check your work:

- Which words, images or phrases shall I deliberately choose to effectively communicate my key message(s)? What should I leave unsaid?
- What is missing from public thinking that I need to address?
- Review the general guidance on how to communicate. How can I embed these tips to inform and build understanding?
- Who is my key audience? Do they share collective values and what will resonate with them most?
- What image, if any, will accompany my communications? Visit our [Flickr page](#) to download real-life images of community justice for free.



## Any questions?

Thank you for taking the time to work through this toolkit.

If you want more help and support, get in touch:

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