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# Developing Local Housing Partnerships through 'Serious Games'

Written by: Professor Vikki McCall, Professor Alasdair Rutherford, Dr Rebekah Luff, Tasnim Rahman







## Developing Local Housing Partnerships through 'Serious Games' in Southwark



### Executive Summary

The global ageing population, alongside a lack of accessible housing is a key issue requiring further social research, and policy initiatives. There are many non-decent and inaccessible homes in the UK, making future-proofing a key development priority.

Our Serious Game 'Hopetown' allows for more effective planning amongst health, housing, and social care sectors. The results of the gameplay session in Southwark revealed some interesting results, developing solutions to support an ageing population.

To overcome stigma associated with ageing and disability, housing, health and social care sectors must communicate to proactively plan for increased future health and social care need. Differences in need and experiences amongst diverse populations must be considered when designing future-proofed solutions. Integrated and transparent approaches are necessary to provide accessible housing, and services to communities.

The report offers key recommendations and priorities developed with key stakeholders in Southwark that prioritise supporting people with dementia, working with diverse groups and people in the community and investment in different types of housing with development of a range of housing models and budget options in Southwark.





## Background of the Project

The Commission on the Role of Housing in the Future of Care and Support, funded by **Dunhill Medical Trust** and led by the **Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)**, identified local housing partnerships as essential for local areas to create a local housing plan (for older adults). Furthermore, the Commission found that ‘getting the right people in the room’ was a barrier to initiating the development of a local housing plan. To be successful, those involved in a ‘local housing partnership’, spanning housing, health, social care, social work, local planning and elected local officials, need to work together.

Therefore, we have embarked on a pilot project within Southwark that implemented a creative and innovative ‘Serious Game’ as a tool for developing local housing partnerships. This project is in partnership with SCIE, **Socialudo**, **Housing LIN**, **United St Saviours Charity**, and funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust. The project has piloted a mechanism called a ‘Serious Game’ for encouraging effective partnership working, developed from research led by the **University of Stirling** (see **Housing and Ageing: Linking strategy to future delivery for Scotland, Wales and England 2030 ; Let’s Get Serious—“How Do You Plan for the Future while Addressing Immediate Chaos?”** )

The Serious Game engaged local key stakeholders in Southwark in October 2023, bringing them together to overcome challenges that specifically affect housing and planning for the ageing population. Games are particularly good at synthesising complex issues, making them much more accessible, and allowing players to think strategically about the future. Following the pilot in Southwark, at least one further pilot is planned followed by a roll out into other areas as a group activity to bring together key stakeholders (including different leaders/managers) who oversee planning and delivery activities.

To summarise the project and give insight into the process please see this 5-minute video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDHh0AYvEE8>

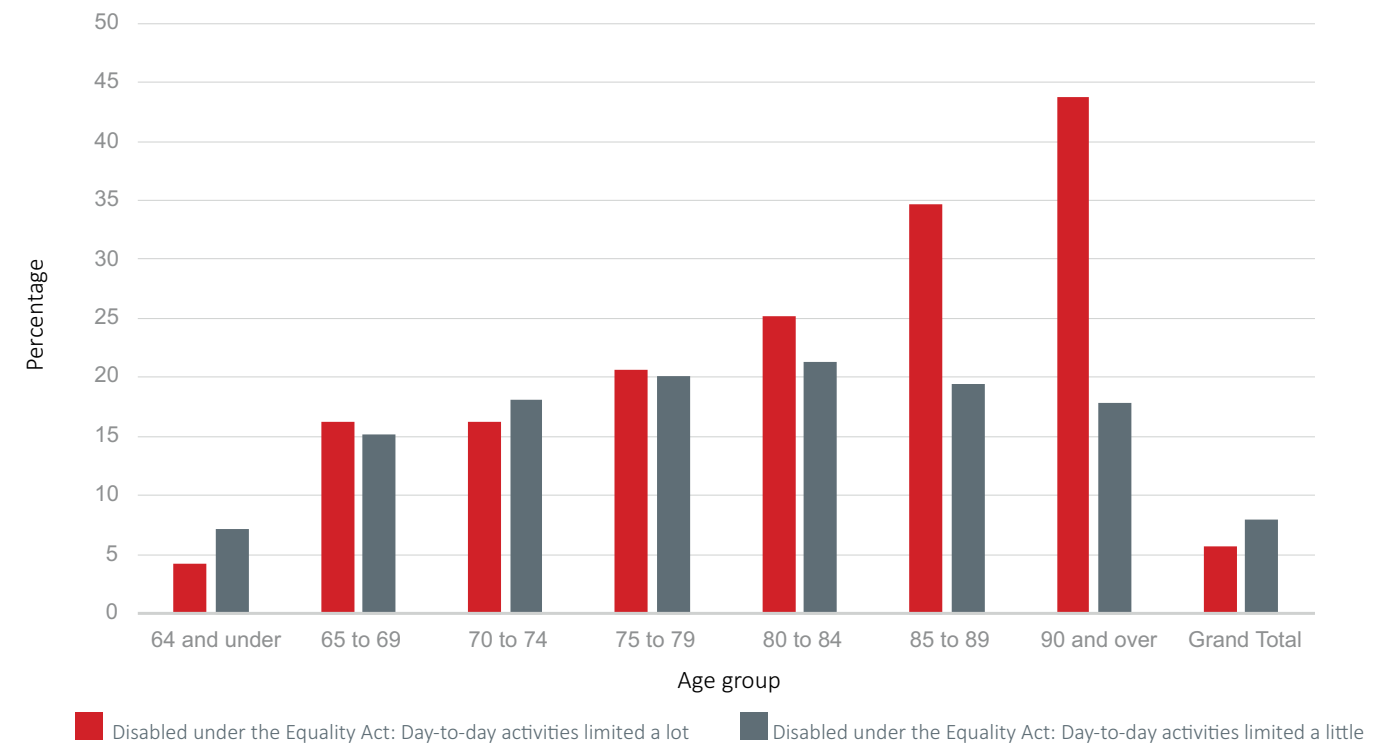
And to see the gameplay in action: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyU2Err5o-g>

## Introduction - Why Plan for an Ageing Population?

Issues surrounding the global ageing population are of increasing importance to social research and governmental discussions. The World Health Organisation (2022) have demonstrated that, by 2030, 1 in 6 people, globally, will be aged 60 years or over, compared to just 1 in 10 people today. Furthermore, in the UK today, there are almost 11 million people aged 65 and over, an estimated 19% of the UK population (Age UK 2022). For Southwark, Census data (2021) shows that the number of adults aged 55-59 has increased by 59% since 2011, and it has been projected by POPPI (Projecting Older People Population Information) that:

- ◆ The number of people under 18 will increase by 7,600.
- ◆ The number of working age adults will increase by 38,200. This increase will be particularly concentrated in the north of the borough, with reductions in the population in the south.
- ◆ The number of people aged 65 and over will increase by 13,700 by 2030, with increases across the borough.

**Figure 1:** Percentage of people within each age group in Southwark who have a disability (Census 2021)



The Census 2021 data shown in **Figure 1** highlights that disability is not distributed equally across the population, with older age groups most likely to report one or more disabilities that significantly limit their day-to-day activities.

Nationally, the number of years individuals, on average, can expect to live without a disabling health condition is also declining. Research by The Centre for Ageing Better (2022) further conveys this phenomenon, with their findings showing that individual health is declining, on average, stating that men can now expect to live for 62.4 years, and women 60.9 years in good health.

Furthermore, people overwhelmingly report wanting to age-in-place, emphasising the increasing need for incorporating future-proofing design strategies into modern community and housing developments. Despite this, the housing sector remains woefully underprepared for the ageing demographic, with 19% of homes in England classed as non-decent (Centre for Ageing Better 2019; Mackintosh and Heywood 2015 ), further emphasising the increasing need to develop future-proofed, accessible housing.





## Hopetown: A Serious Game to Help Plan for Housing the Ageing Population

Providing a range of housing options for an ageing population represents several challenges due to:

- ◆ Stigma associated with ageing and disability.
- ◆ A lack of strategic planning.
- ◆ Reactive responses to health crisis linked to non-decent homes.
- ◆ A lack of communication amongst professionals.

The significant social stigma surrounding ageing means that traditional ways of communication and planning for older age often produce ineffective results. Therefore, our serious game, 'Hopetown', was developed to explore the challenges in providing housing to support healthy ageing over time. We employ Hopetown as an impact methodology for generating important insight and strategies surrounding housing and ageing within housing and technology sectors.

Within the game, players take on different roles, and must negotiate how to use limited resources to maximise the wellbeing of the residents of the fictional Hopetown.

Real life changes are made over the course of the game, prompting group discussion regarding the consequences of the decisions that have been made. This is the primary way in which the game encourages future planning and strategic thinking, generating knowledge on the barriers to resilient ageing in place, and creating a collaborative tool for communities to co-produce solutions. This innovative research has emphasised several key points regarding what is needed to properly develop housing to accommodate an ageing population:

- ◆ The increased need for partnership working between housing, health, and social care sectors.
- ◆ The need for more strategic planning for future demographic change.
- ◆ Housing planning and support is an underexplored yet key priority, especially in the preventative agenda.





## Gameplay in Southwark

Our findings from our research in Southwark, employing Hopetown as an interactive methodology, produced some interesting results regarding developing solutions to support an ageing population. Therefore, our research shed light on the steps necessary to develop future-proofed housing to support communities in Southwark.

## Housing impact and the 'ripple in the pond'

One of the participants described planning for housing and ageing as having a 'ripple in the pond' effect, where the right housing makes a beneficial 'splash' for that individual while also sending positive 'ripples' across the wider health, housing, and social care sectors. Setting up someone to age-well in the right home and place can trigger a domino effect for others accessing available housing. In this way, developing future-proofed homes can prevent health crises, and create a setting where care, community and supporting wellbeing is easier.



## Key priorities

During the gameplay session, the teams uncovered several key priorities, necessary to the adequate provision of accessible homes to support an ageing population:

Information and advice training for residents was a key priority. There was creative service provision developed around hub and support – A Centre for Excellence was requested and funded by the policy makers.

Place-based intervention was a priority push and pull between individual services, resulting in negotiation and debate around the wealthy and deprived areas.

Care, accessibility, green spaces, and later-dementia care support were key priorities, taking precedence over Wi-Fi and technology. Indeed, the need for dementia support planning was highlighted by the participants, with one player stating that:

“A key issue I learned was that dementia toppled people into crisis.”

As such, this is a primary factor that must be considered when planning for future developments.

Inter-generational and inter-cultural provision that acknowledges that not all housing, health and social care needs are homogenous. Southwark has a diverse and multi-cultural landscape that must be reflected in policy.

Partnership working is crucial. Some key feedback received was that if everyone worked together, focusing on well-being rather than prevention, proactive planning would be easier. This idea was heavily emphasised by the participant evaluations. One of the developers stated:

“(The workshop conveyed) the need to work together to deliver the right solution, the need to negotiate and with that compromise when needed. Without unlimited resources we are not going to have perfect outcomes, but we can certainly make things better.”



Person-led intervention helped support policy decisions that impact on an individual level. The importance of partnership and communication was emphasised, with a need for more interaction from the beginning of the planning process. During the session there was not always a consensus amongst teams. The community team reflected:

“Health, Housing and Care are all in crisis. If we can work together in spectrum from admission end rather than the discharge end for someone, we have longer to plan it.”

Indeed, the need for collaborative partnership across sectors was an opinion shared by almost all the workshop participants, with many emphasising the importance of inter-departmental working to improve individual health and wellbeing outcomes throughout the game, and in their evaluations.

Aids and adaptations are essential. The players emphasised the importance of the physical environment, with the community team arguing that:

“Networks and partnerships are very important, and we perhaps are focused too much on the physical aspects in home.”

This raises a key issue that, when designing future-proofed homes and communities, the environment, and services available are also important to consider, in addition to housing-based adaptations, to improve individual wellbeing, and mental health outcomes.



## Prevention

Throughout the game, it was also made very clear that activity addressing difficulties and need should be proactive rather than reactive.

The need for collaborative partnership was particularly apparent when dementia planning crises arose, with many participants expressing frustration over a lack of proactive initiatives across teams. Teams wanted to plan, however, negotiations between teams, and a clash of priorities made this very difficult. As such, participants found it hard to negotiate between wider priorities and their personal values. This difficulty was particularly pronounced as the game progressed. One developer reflected that:

“As difficult decisions had to be made then conflict increased.”

An instance of this occurred when one team (the service providers) were focused on prevention, this resulted in frustration from other teams that they were not addressing immediate need.



## Barriers and Communication

The gap between policy and practice came into play, particularly regarding the budget allocated by the policy makers team, and its subsequent use. Challenges arose surrounding the teams changing their priorities last minute, which would interrupt and disrupt key plans. In this way, the connection between market and demand played out in the game. Furthermore, wealthy representatives of the community group had a very strong voice, and throughout the game would emphasize the danger and strength of NIMBYism. This led to a split amongst the community team, where barriers around class and wealth played a key role in the gameplay, resulting in further conflict. Players also initially made assumptions about other teams' priorities, for example, the developers were met immediately with hostility. Team co-production also emphasised the need for effective communication and transparency amongst sectors. For example, the community team – such as in real life – was often overlooked. Service users engaged late, and co-production with developers was a missed opportunity, often coming in too late in the process to be properly implemented.

Therefore, good communication between teams reinforced verification of direction, showing that effective communication made delivery, and planning much easier. This idea was strongly emphasised by all the participants, with one member of the developer team stating that the workshop confirmed:

“The importance of taking time to understand and synthesise the perspectives of all stakeholders.”

In strategic planning, reconceptualising independence to inter-dependence was seen as highly important. This further emphasises the need for collaborative working amongst housing, health, and social care sectors to develop proactive solutions to provide accessible housing, accommodating an ageing population.

## Making sure to support diverse populations in Southwark

We must also acknowledge that there are differences in needs around diverse populations, therefore, it is important to emphasise supporting different groups to create dynamic, cohesive, and mixed communities. One participant argued that:

“Need should drive decision making. Avoid first come first served - pattern of need should be considered as a system.”

This further conveys the importance of a diverse, collaborative approach when planning for future proofed homes and communities. When the community and policy team aligned, it made it easier for the service providers and developers to work. For policy makers in particular there was frustration as what was intended, was not always provided. There were conversations between health and housing in the room. This was excellent and contributed to wider understanding of what different people in the room could deliver and support.



Background information and data about Southwark residents is therefore essential. Good data is important to inform strategic decisions. Discussions about available models in Southwark were important. Transferring knowledge between teams in Southwark was happening in the game and already generating important insights and connections. Surprisingly, players were often clear on what the barriers and challenges to the provision of accessible housing were, but not what the solutions to these problems are.

The need for good communication between teams was further emphasised, reinforcing direction, and making planning and delivery much easier, and more effective.





## Southwark in the National Context

The Care Act in England places duties on council social services departments around preventing and meeting care and support needs, some of which relates to accommodation. As highlighted by the People at the Heart of Care, the 2021 Adult Social Care (ASC) White Paper, the goals of the Care Act are not reliably being met, making it difficult for local areas to meet these goals with limited and inappropriate housing supplies to support health and wellbeing.

The 2021 White Paper emphasised the importance of housing in relation to health and social care policy design. It takes the strong position that *“every decision about care is also a decision about housing”* and that people should have access to a good choice of alternative housing and support options. The White Paper specifically states that the government will *“enable all local areas to agree a plan embedding housing in broader health and care strategies, including investing in jointly commissioned services”*, highlighting that housing that better meets future care and support needs must be delivered within a complex wider housing market, which can not only be achieved by the adult social care system.

Furthermore, the timing of this project coincides with the Older Person’s Housing Taskforce. This cross-government and cross-department group, with its broad expert panel is chaired by Julienne Mayer (<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/older-peoples-housing-taskforce>). The pivotal role of local housing plans, and the need for partnerships will therefore remain on the political agenda, whoever ultimately moves the policy forwards.

Further highlighting the growing expectations on local authorities in relation to planning for forms of specialised housing, the recent Supported Housing Act (2023) requires local authorities in England to review supported housing in their areas and develop strategies.

Regardless of the policy context, the UK has an ageing population, and we must prepare for that. To be successful, a ‘local housing partnership’ spanning social and private sector housing, health, social care, social work, local planning, local community and third sector organisations, as well as elected local officials need to work together. The Serious Game pilot study has highlighted the importance of bringing together people in local areas with responsibility for, or stakeholders in, planning housing with care and support. Therefore, this pilot study has strongly highlighted the importance of working together across housing, health, and social care.





## Recommendations

At the end of the Serious Game, participants completed an evaluation form and indicated what their priorities for next steps in Southwark would be. These were grouped and used to create a set of top-level recommendations. During the workshop held on the 5th of October at Appleby Blue, attendees were asked to highlight their top three recommendations.

## Top three

The top recommendations related to support for those living with dementia, particularly by the older residents. Working with a diverse group was particularly important to wider stakeholders and Southwark council staff, while more housing was jointly highlighted by residents and other stakeholders:

- ◆ Supporting people with dementia - Prioritise proactive dementia support in housing, environments, and care.
- ◆ Working with diverse groups and people in the community - Ensure there is a co-production plan in place to centralise the role of community-led change as integral to a strategy for housing. Develop mechanisms that support co-production within the community to better understand diverse needs and groups and how they can be supported.
- ◆ More Housing - Investment in different types of housing with the development of a range of housing models and budget options in Southwark.

## Key priorities

Advice and information were crucial to residents and other stakeholders, but much less important for Southwark Council staff. In contrast, preparing for the older population was least important to residents, but was a key concern for council staff and wider stakeholders. Research and data were, perhaps unsurprisingly, a high priority for council staff. Linking key groups was also essential to council staff with some support from the other groups. Furthermore, tackling stigma was most important to residents with some support from other stakeholders.

- ◆ Advice and Information - Services supporting information and housing advice, care, and support for residents in Southwark across tenure (social, private rent, homeownership).
- ◆ Getting ready for an ageing population in Southwark - Create a strategic, future facing plan for housing and ageing for Southwark to enable choice, adaptability, and resilience.
- ◆ Research and Data - Gather data and evidence to give insight into current housing provisions for older adults in Southwark including a focus on inter-generational and inter-cultural provision.
- ◆ Linking key groups - Create mechanisms and a platform to share priorities between key stakeholders, from local politicians, local council, third sector, housing providers and the community.
- ◆ Tackling Stigma - Focus on tackling stigma connected to certain types of housing that is perceived to be unpopular (e.g., sheltered housing) by investment in current stock and examining how different housing models can support diverse community needs.

## Other priorities

The remaining priorities received just 1 or 2 selections at the workshop and no more than 1 selection by any of the groups:

- ◆ Current Housing - Invest in aids and adaptations to focus on current housing. Furthermore, the existing aids and adaptations processes and retrofit should be simplified.
- ◆ Surrounding Area - Prioritise neighbourhood and place planning to invest in the areas that need it most and avoid increasing inequalities between areas and groups.
- ◆ Person-led approaches - Centre people, not systems and buildings, to integrate needs based and person-led approaches into strategy across health, housing, and care to overcome budget-led strategy barriers.
- ◆ Language - Shift the conversation and language between health, care, and housing so that the discussion around discharge is planned more proactively and happens earlier in the hospital stay.
- ◆ Working together - Focus on partnership working to support housing transitions, making them smoother and more effective for service users, supporting individuals in health and housing (such as homelessness, delayed discharge, etc.).





# Strategic plan for housing and ageing

## The Southwark Plan 2019-2036

## Social regeneration in Southwark



Ageing Well in Southwark - Age friendly Cities (Consultation held earlier this year)

Southwark Housing Strategy to 2043

Older people housing plan

Age friendly borough consultation 2015

Frailty strategy



### **Conclusion**

**The session emphasised the importance of several keyways of working:**

partnership, communication methods, joint decision making, information and advice, and co-production. The 'ripple in the pond' effect of planning for housing and ageing was clear, where working together to prepare for ageing and diverse health needs is critical to improve wellbeing and quality of life.

**“ Health, Housing and Care are all in crisis. If we can work together in spectrum from admission end rather than the discharge end for someone, we have longer to plan it. ”**  
(Community Team)

HACT Age Friendly Social Housing Programme



There is a lot of interesting work and new strategies already in existence and being planned for in Southwark. A strategic plan for housing and ageing can help bring all these together, generating the 'ripple effect' across housing, health, and social care.



## Thank you to participants at the Serious Game & Workshop

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Cathy Deplessis, **Director (Southwark Pensioners)**

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Emily Moyo, **Operations Manager (Luton Borough Council)**

Cllr Helen Dennis, **Cabinet Member for New Homes, and Sustainable Development (Southwark Council)**

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Lauren Walker, **Professional Adviser (RCOT)**

Martyn Craddock, **CEO (United St Saviours)**

Nancy Kuchemann, **Co-chair (Partnership Southwark)**

Paul Quinn, **Director of Regeneration (Clarion Housing Group)**

Pauline O'Hare, **Director of Adult Social Care (Southwark Council)**

Perry Singh, **Head of Strategy & Business Support (Southwark Council)**

Robert Weallans, **Housing Strategy Manager (Southwark Council)**

Roland Karthaus, **Director (Matters Architect Practice)**

Ross Diamond, **CEO (Age UK Lewisham and Southwark)**

Sajda Munshi, **Private Sector Housing and Adaptations Manager (Southwark Council)**

Sarah Thurman, **Head of Community Investments (United St Saviours)**

Sheena Starrett, **Age-friendly Coordinator (HACT)**

Dr Shim Vereker, **Principal programme manager (Southwark Council)**

Stefanie Buckner, **Public Health Policy Officer (Southwark Council)**

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Will Cole, **Programme Director (One Southwark)**

**7 residents of Appleby Blue Almshouse**

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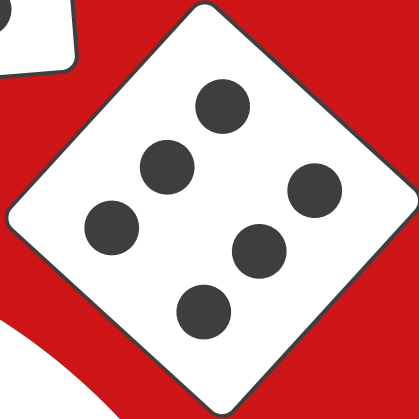
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