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Developing local housing partnerships: a Serious Game for older people's housing



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Housing LIN

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About SCIE

The Social Care Institute for Excellence improves the lives of people of all ages by co-producing, sharing, and supporting the use of the best available knowledge and evidence about what works in practice. We are a leading improvement support agency and an independent charity working with organisations that support adults, families and children across the UK. We also work closely with related services such as health care and housing.

We improve the quality of care and support services for adults and children by:

- identifying and sharing knowledge about what works and what's new
- supporting people who plan, commission, deliver and use services to put that knowledge into practice
- informing, influencing and inspiring the direction of future practice and policy.

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Funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust

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This project was undertaken in partnership with United St Saviour's Charity and the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN).

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First published in Great Britain March 2024 by the Social Care Institute for Excellence

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from a pilot study of a 'Serious Game' called Hopetown, an innovative tool for developing local housing partnerships. We set out why local housing partnerships are an essential first step in developing strategic local plans for older people's housing. The pilot study was conducted in Southwark, London, in early October 2023 over a two-day period with a group of key stakeholders in the local authority and local organisations including health, housing, social care and community groups.

We present an evaluation of this pilot study, outlining the game activities and play as well as the priorities, learning and next steps in relation to housing for older people within Southwark.

Game play

Within the 'Serious Game', people are able to face the repercussions of decisions and priorities to help explore the complexities of planning for the future. Players take on roles such as policy makers, developers, service providers and the community, often different to the one they usually do day-to-day (eg, policy makers cannot play as policy makers in the game) to encourage a paradigm shift in thinking while working together to increase the wellbeing of residents in 'Hopetown'.

Observations made during the day and initial reflections from players included insights and learning around:

The importance of understanding the diversity of the local older population. Wealthier residents wielded greater 'market power' to directly engage developers and shape decisions.

Effective communication – talking to the right groups at the right time was a recurrent challenge, with the community team (the residents) sometimes being left out of key decisions.

Collaboration and co-production - Getting all the people involved in one place made it easier to make better informed decisions about the current and future plans for housing for older adults.

Setting Priorities:

Two days after the game a workshop was held at Appleby Blue almshouse, which included residents and provided an opportunity for participants to prioritise next steps for Southwark.

Highest level priorities for a housing plan:

- 🏠 To co-produce a housing plan that meets the accommodation needs of a diverse community
- 🏠 Supporting people with dementia and chronic conditions with proactive dementia support and aids, adaptations and retrofits
- 🏠 Investment in different types of housing with the development of a range of housing models and budget options in Southwark. Prioritising accessible housing with aids and adaptations.

- 🏠 A needs based and person-centered approach for rehousing older adults within their communities and neighbourhoods
- 🏠 Becoming proactive and preventative as opposed to reactionary in responding to crises

Suggested mechanisms for an improved housing plan:

- 🏠 Inclusive language around housing, care and support and the needs of older adults
- 🏠 Multi-agency planning highlighted the imperative for adaptive, participatory approaches to housing planning
- 🏠 Aiming to foster equitable, person-centred and community-centred solutions.

Impact and next steps:

As with any local area, Southwark was working on a number of plans and strategies that related to housing for older people both within the local authority and also across other local stakeholders. Following Hopetown some organisations experienced a shift in stakeholder engagement, fostering new collaborations, softening relationships, and catalysing proactive planning efforts. The process of developing an older people's housing strategy was already in the pipeline and is moving forward in 2024 in Southwark. Hopetown has supported the widening of the stakeholders who could be involved in this strategic thinking and supported Southwark in some initial, wider thinking ready to start that plan.

Hopetown supports learning and action in relation to:

- **Strategic Thinking:** Hopetown provided the time and headspace to think about ageing in place, which can be difficult amidst daily pressures. Recognising the importance of making time for strategic planning with the right people.
- **Perspective Taking:** The experience of taking on different job roles in the game, led to better understanding of other stakeholders as well as how perspective making supports communication, negotiation and decision making.
- **Motivation to collaborate with more stakeholders:** The game reminded participants about the importance of networking and building connections within and outside the local authority.
- **Enabling choice and control:** Participants emphasised the need for meaningful co-production and early community involvement in decision-making.

Conclusion:

The pilot demonstrated that Hopetown can help to bring together and support the development of a local housing partnership. Initial impact indicates that it can help strengthen and build relationships between organisations. Hopetown provides an engaging and imaginative method of bringing people together, breaking down silos and enabling headspace for strategic thinking.

Local housing partnerships and the 'Serious Game'

This report offers insight into taking innovative and different approaches – such as serious games – to bring people together to develop a shared vision for housing for older people that supports age friendly communities. The report is particularly for those local areas looking to start or refresh housing strategies or a business case for housing for older people.

We present the key findings from a pilot study of a 'Serious Game' called Hopetown, a novel tool for developing local housing partnerships. In this report we set out what we mean by a local housing partnership and why they are an essential element for developing and delivering strategic local plans for older people's housing. This report describes a pilot of Hopetown undertaken in Southwark. We set out key learning and insights from the game both in relation to priorities for Southwark's older people's housing strategy and in relation to forms of working and activities needed to deliver that plan. Drawing on a follow-up with participants in Southwark, we describe what has happened since the game before setting out wider learning from Hopetown.

This report is of interest to local authorities and all those professions, teams and organisations whose contribution is vital to any local plan for housing for older adults, including, of course, older people themselves.

What is a local housing partnership and why is it important?

In 2021 SCIE published the findings from the **Commission on the Role of Housing in the Future of Care and Support**. The report included a roadmap, with the following immediate priority for local areas, that they should:

“...produce a single place-based plan for housing with care and support for older people which is shaped by the local authority, the NHS, local planning authorities, other local partners, and people who draw on care and support.”

These local plans will help local areas to better understand where they are now in relation to housing options for older adults, where they would like to be, and identify their next steps and priorities in order to get there. SCIE has **developed a toolkit** to support local areas in developing this plan, setting out how this could be achieved in a series of steps. In the development of this toolkit, the importance of the partnership undertaking that plan was highlighted – ensuring key groups working together is 'Step 0' of any housing plan or strategy for older people.

Developing a plan for housing for older adults is not something one department can do on their own; it is more effective in terms of delivery and implementation when everyone works together. Local housing partnerships are essential for local areas to create an overarching vision and strategic housing plan for older adults.



A housing partnership can:

- 🏠 Ensure the right people are in the room with the range of expertise needed to develop a robust age-friendly housing strategy
- 🏠 Support co-production and shared decision making with older people and the wider community
- 🏠 Help identify local data, business intelligence and information held by different partners to avoid duplicating effort
- 🏠 Make best use of capacity and funding
- 🏠 Ensure buy-in of any plan, greatly enabling the delivery of the vision and plan.

Who could be part of a housing partnership?

Every local area is different, but some of the key groups that should be involved in local plans for housing for older adults are:

- 👤 Older people and carers, representative groups, charities and community groups
- 👤 Senior Local Authority (LA) leaders focussed on housing, social care, older adults
- 👤 LA social services, occupational therapists, social workers and community workers
- 👤 LA housing and planning departments as well as finance / corporate resources, regeneration and growth or improvement that relates to housing and/or older adults
- 👤 Commissioners, Better Care Fund managers
- 👤 NHS, community health, occupational therapists and mental health leads
- 👤 Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Boards (for information on these see [here](#)) or Health and Wellbeing Boards
- 👤 Elected members: county, borough parish or town councillors
- 👤 Builders, planners and architects
- 👤 Social care and community services providers
- 👤 General needs and specialist housing providers (LA, housing associations and commercial operators)
- 👤 Developers and housebuilders
- 👤 Grant makers/funders of housing for older people (e.g. Homes England, Greater London Authority)

About Hopetown

Serious gaming is an innovative and creative way of bringing people into a room to create a paradigm shift, help them understand the impact of decisions over time and explore serious topics in a fun way. Hopetown is a serious game that aims to help future-proof housing, and highlight the consequences of not planning for the ageing demographic.

Hopetown helps explore a range of housing options for an ageing population and to overcome key challenges that include:

- A lack of group planning and 'buy in' from the key stakeholders involved in older people's housing.
- Stigma associated with ageing and disability.
- A lack of strategic planning.
- Reactive responses to crises in relation to homelessness, non-decent homes, delays in hospital discharge
- A lack of communication and understanding amongst professionals.

The significant social stigma surrounding ageing means that traditional ways of communication and planning for older age often produce ineffective results. Therefore, the serious game methodology has been developed over time, with a robust evidence base especially in the area of wargaming and education. 'Hopetown' focuses on making the essential links between health, social care and housing and is delivered by the social enterprise, Socialudo, to make research impact and explore the challenges in providing housing to support healthy ageing over time. Hopetown can be employed 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 to the one they usually do (e.g. policy makers cannot play as policy makers in the game) and must negotiate how to use limited resources to maximise the wellbeing of the residents of the fictional Hopetown. Hopetown itself consists of a range of areas, which vary in terms of their wealth and environment.

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 solution.



Hopetown teams



Policy makers

This team are in charge of allocating budgets to the developers, service providers, and community teams. With approval and satisfaction ratings in mind, the policy makers have a tough role negotiating with the teams of what their plans are for that coming year, and allocating parts of the budget.

Developers

This team are in charge of building new developments, and their aims are often to make more profit. Developers require planning permission from the policy makers and have the choice to add new housing anywhere on the map. They also have the power to decide whether to upgrade houses and flats for extra care and support, and comment on innovative builds for community support.



Service providers

The service providers are in charge of providing and designating fixed and mobile services, community transport, and housing adaptations that are suitable for the older adults in the community. Their decisions are based on the community's current financial standing and what care needs have been identified. To do this, they need the right amount of funding from the policy makers team.



Community team

At the heart of Hopetown are the people who live in Hopetown. All the residents have different needs to each other, and request subsidy and support required from all of the teams. They also track their own wellbeing, health and income. Essentially it is the wellbeing of all the residents that visualises whether the service providers and developers are making the right decisions for them. The game starts with a group of residents, each with their own name (Anya, Brian, Carol...) and some already living in unsuitable housing. As the game progresses, more are added.



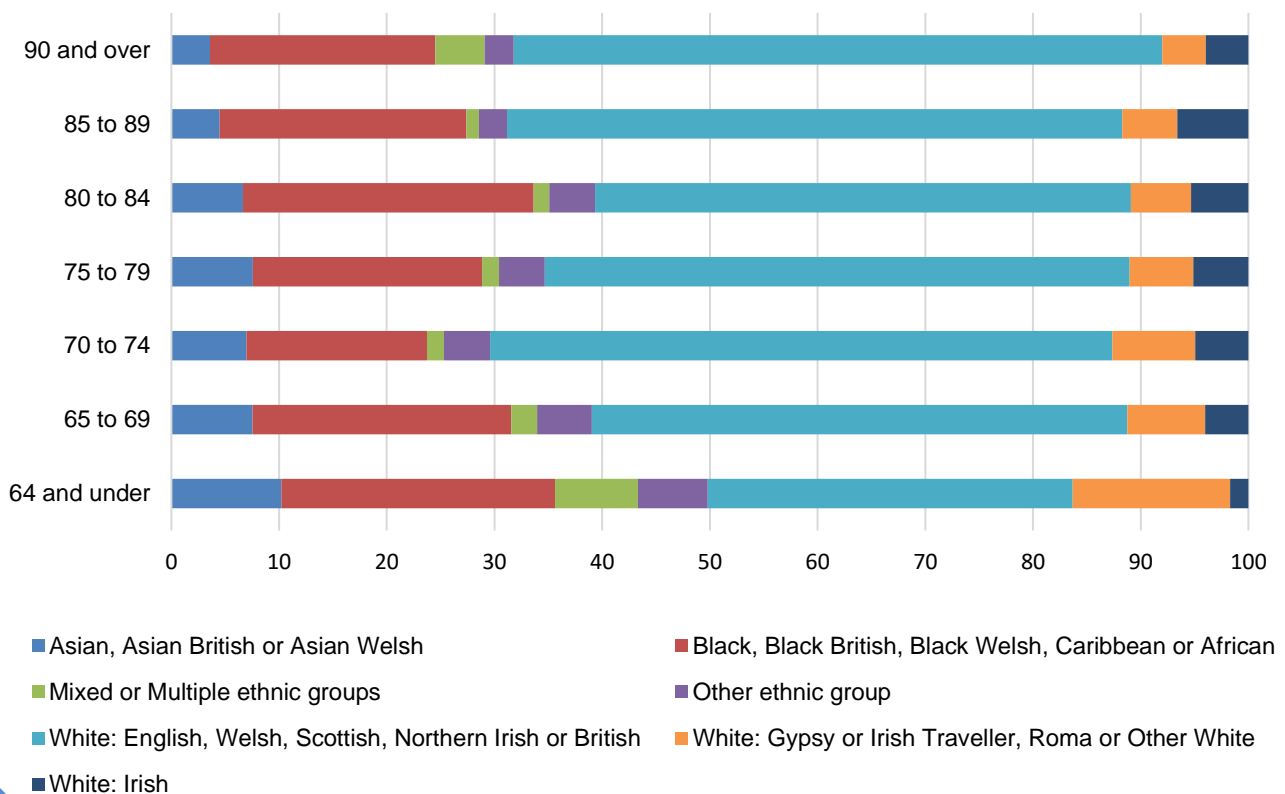
The potential benefits of serious games, and specifically Hopetown have already been evidenced following events with policy makers in England, Scotland and Wales as set out in [McCall et al 2020](#) and in a [housing and ageing report](#) led by University of Stirling. These events were at more of a national level, and so a version of Hopetown was developed specifically for Southwark to facilitate a local housing strategy. Key learning points from these previous games aligned well with what would also be helpful at a local level. These include the effectiveness of integrating services to enhance wellbeing, the importance of housing in supporting an ageing population to live independently, the need for an integrated approach to housing within wider policies such as health, social care, and technology, and the significance of housing in improving people's health and wellbeing. Key learning and challenges around communication and negotiation were also highlighted. Recommendations included increased consultation with older individuals, and closer collaboration between communities, housing providers and service providers so they can work together on long-term planning and early intervention in relation to housing and wellbeing.

About Southwark

The London Borough of Southwark is part of inner London and is in the South of the city. With the Thames as its north boundary, it is a highly diverse borough, in terms of people, density and housing mix. It is one of the smallest English districts by area, with just over 11 square miles, but one of the larger districts by population, with over 306,000 people.

The Census 2021 data shown in figure 1 highlights that Southwark's older population has a very diverse population in terms of ethnicity.

Southwark's population by age and ethnicity (Census 2021)



Census data additionally highlights that disability is not distributed equally across the population, with older age groups most likely to report one or more disabilities that limit their day-to-day activities a lot.

Southwark has a higher proportion of adults aged 75+ living in the social rented sector than the national average with 59% doing so (Census, 2021). Across London boroughs, Southwark, Lambeth and Ealing had the highest number of delayed hospital discharges due to awaiting residential home placement or availability, nursing home placement or availability or awaiting care packages for their own homes ([ARCO, 2024, citing NHS Delayed Transfers of Care Data](#)).

Strategies in Southwark

When meeting with key groups in the summer of 2023 we found that as with any local area, Southwark Council as well as the housing, social care, health and community sectors had a number of existing and planned activities, strategies and networks that related in some way to housing for older adults. These represented a wealth of helpful information as well as knowledge and expertise. Teams working on new, or delivering existing plans were not always linked-in and sharing information that could be mutually beneficial.

Existing relevant plans within the Council included:

- [The Southwark Plan 2019-2036](#)
- [Social regeneration in Southwark](#)
- Southwark Housing Strategy to 2043
- [Age friendly borough consultation 2015](#)

Upcoming/ongoing activities in 2023 included:

- Ageing Well in Southwark - Age friendly Cities ([Consultation](#) held in 2023)
- Serious thinking about developing an older people's housing strategy

Outside of the council, health and housing were also developing new strategies and groups:

[Partnership Southwark](#) (a Local Care Partnership within the overall South East London Integrated Care System) are leading on a frailty strategy.

HACT (the charity of the social housing sector), [Age Friendly Social Housing Programme](#) which includes a number of activities and partnership working in Southwark.



Bringing together key players in Southwark to play Hopetown

Two in-person events were held in Southwark:

- 1) The game of Hopetown itself. This was almost a full day and was held at the council building. The day started with some presentations about housing for older adults, before moving into the game itself. There were three rounds played in total before a debrief at the end of the day.
- 2) A workshop was held at Appleby Blue almshouse two days after the game. Most of the people attending had not attended the game, though some had. It was an opportunity to hear about the day, find out about key related activities in the sector and to engage in an exercise to decide which of the priorities identified in the game were most important.



Opening in 2023, Appleby Blue almshouse is run by United St Saviour's Charity. The 57 apartment development enables social interaction and includes a resident support model as well as a community kitchen and centre.

Getting the right people in the room

The key challenge for this pilot was ensuring the right people were in the room.

While the key people that could support a local housing partnership have been described above, each local authority structure differs, as do existing groups and partnerships. The key community groups, older people's forums, social and health care providers and housing availability also vary from place to place. The team spent some time understanding Southwark, where they were with their housing planning and future aims, and who to invite.

We aimed for 20-25 people to play the game and made key decisions early on:

- 🏠 About half of the players should be from Southwark Council and half from the wider community. This worked well and highlighted how useful the wider range of stakeholders could be.
- 🏠 We invited groups that represented older adults (pensioners groups etc) to play Hopetown, and then invited older residents to the workshop at the almshouse Appleby Blue.
- 🏠 We held the game at the council offices to make it easier for people working there to attend and held the workshop at the almshouse Appleby Blue, to position it more within the wider community.



In general, accessing, speaking to and bringing stakeholders who were outside of the council onboard was relatively straightforward. Many were keen to be involved and could also suggest others to include. Their knowledge of Southwark and key groups was essential.

An exception was private providers of social care, however local managers are not responsible for development decisions and head-office may have been less interested in a Southwark-specific activity. Some different approaches – for example, via provider representative organisations could have been more fruitful.

Accessing and speaking to senior managers within the wider range of council teams whose role relates to older adults, wellbeing and/or housing, required more time and relationship building. Some key people facilitated these connections and meetings.

Getting 'Serious' about housing – playing the game

The teams of policymakers, service providers, developers, and the community embarked on a journey to address housing and well-being challenges in Hopetown. The facilitators introduced the game, prompting the policymakers to wisely allocate their budget to each team.

Round one: Negotiating inequalities in service provision

The service providers focused on the importance of information regarding types of homes, and care plans. This sparked emotive conversations on the needs of different demographics, the significance of visual aids, and the bureaucratic challenges that arise. Initially curious about identifying older persons' situations, all teams attempted to identify individual situations and wealth, and support needs required by examining the map of Hopetown.

The developer team concentrated on making a profit while also considering care interests.

Developers engaged in discussions with policymakers, addressing criteria, subsidies, and the challenge of balancing profitability with community needs.

"We need to build relationships with the policymakers to get things done." (Developer)

"We need to know what it feels like to spend money." (Developer)

"We don't want any ghettos; we want equitable spaces." (Service provider)

With the budget set, the teams engaged in discussions about service provision needs, inequality, and the proactive role of policymakers. Service providers tried to understand the needs of the community team, emphasising the requirement for transport links and mobile services, whilst also targeting welfare spending in less affluent areas.



The community team grappled with individual preferences and needs. Notably, 'Emily' preferred not to have social housing nearby due to her financial status. They considered the diversity of communities and the challenge of finding a one-size-fits-all solution. The team engaged in discussions about transport, services, and early intervention for dementia.

"Emily has money so please don't put any social housing near her instead make other people move elsewhere." (Community)

"Fixed services and community transport combined can do more than a mobile service as they also combat loneliness and isolation." (Community)

As the round concluded, service providers were not confident that their services would be efficient and this was noticeable at the table. Reflections emerged, and the community team appeared unsatisfied, expressing concerns about inequality persisting. Tea break discussions revealed dissatisfaction with the service providers.



Round two: The value of relationship-building

A few years on, Brian and Hannah from the community team are facing financial constraints, and they become the focus for the policy makers at the start of the next round of allocating budgets. The policy makers juggle priorities, pointing to the map's grey areas, emphasising the necessity of accessible housing and the urgency to address chronic health conditions.

During a spirited exchange, a community person advocated for increased grants to the development team, emphasising the need for new housing with community facilities. Amidst negotiations, the community team, concerned about gentrification, called for rent control in certain areas, especially for residents like Brian.

The dialogue unfolded, with the community, developer, and policy teams coming together to discuss the allocation of funds. The community team stressed the importance of environmental quality in industrialised areas, while the developer team advocated for increased funding for specialist providers, highlighting the value of relationship-building.

As the policy makers distributed funds, tensions rose. The policy makers led in discussions with developers, aiming to build a local centre with innovation funding. A complex web of negotiations ensued, with the community team expressing concerns about immediate needs not being identified by the service providers, and the developers focused on long-term, profit-oriented goals.

Meanwhile, the service providers proposed a Health and Social Care Partnership, envisioning a training academy

"Brian has suitable housing but due to regeneration of Portland [an industrialised area in Hoptown] he can no longer afford to live there. Can there be a rent control scheme as he doesn't want to move." (Community)

"So we found out that we have some money that was in underspend, and we have decided to give it towards innovation funds." (Policy maker)

and a center of excellence for learning. Despite calls for diversity, challenges in mindset shift, and a humorous interlude, the team laid out a radical plan.

However the community team were not happy about this.

In the developers' realm, the struggle between profit and community service came to the forefront. The team debated whether to focus on two builds or one, with some members emphasising preventative health measures and others prioritising financial gains.

However, last-minute changes in direction by the policy makers, through aligning with the community team left the developers scrambling to adjust their plans and get their planning permission in on time.

Reflecting on the challenging round, a policy maker expressed a sense of powerlessness, emphasising the difficulty in influencing certain aspects of the game and how this mirrors real life.

“We are more radical now. Do we want more preventive approach? He [Gordon] will eventually have dementia as it will get worse. 30% of the population will have dementia before 30.” (Service provider)

“Service providers are not coming to us, in turn one they asked where we were and expected community to go to them. In turn two they were joined by two community people but were more focussed on what the policy people were offering.” (Community)

“This is not at all about the well-being of residents, but the last minute change and difficult attitude.” (Developer)

Round three: The impact of unsuitable housing

The last chance for policy makers to set things in stone for the next few years. The stakes are high, and many people are in crisis, at risk of becoming homeless or already made homeless as the budget cuts were announced. The service providers decided to go around the map and speak to the community team to find out what their needs are so they don't waste time figuring out what to do later on. They were clear that:

“We want to mobilise services for individuals who do not want to move.” (Service provider)

Meanwhile, care home needs had surged, prompting developers to propose a mixed approach of a care home and housing with support with cross-subsidy. Homelessness emerged as a pressing concern. Service providers agreed to offer necessary services out of their budget, including adjustments, mobile services, and homelessness services.

However, tensions rose during the discussion about increasing housing. The developers faced budget constraints, leading to a clash of priorities. One of the developers expressed frustration that they provide enough housing. Community (Sharon) arrives at the table. Sharon is in hospital and can not leave as her home is not suitable. This does not get resolved. Meanwhile, the developers have agreed the site of the new 2-in-1 build with the wealthier members of the community group.

Policy maker: Comes over to the developers and is querying the site of the 2 in 1.
Developers: The 2 in 1 we have is in the posh area and we have people to move into it and we don't want to move it elsewhere.
Policy makers: You won't get a subsidy then.
Developers: Okay then, it's only £2.

Some members of the community team expressed discontent over the prioritisation process, advocating for decreased inequality. Suggestions for an intermediate care option and collaborative planning for discharges surfaced.

Service providers, on the other hand, engaged in mapping community needs and discussing potential solutions. The facilitator urged collaboration, emphasizing the importance of early planning for crises, especially in dementia care.

The budget announcement heightened tensions, and amidst discussions, the decision to build temporary campervans emerged as a practical solution, ensuring immediate relief for those in need.

And once again all gathered round the main table, anxious to hear who would receive support and who would be left in unsuitable housing or with too little care at the end of the game.

"Someone in the hospital is safer than someone who is homeless." (Developer)

Announcement as service providers had not yet finalised plans. "Last call or there'll be no services in Hopetown." (Note taker observation)

A video of Hopetown being played in Southwark is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyU2Err5o-g>



On the day observations and reflections



Note takers made some key observations during the day and these were also reflected on by players in their feedback.

Understanding the diversity of older people and their market power (or lack of)

- The community team were made up of different individuals with different needs and wealth.
- They were not always in agreement and the wealthier individuals could approach the developers directly, with the developers happy to build something that people would move into immediately.

Communication – the right people at the right time in the process

- Communication was a challenge with key decisions sometimes being made between two or three teams without including the others. The community team felt excluded at some points.
- The service delivery team had a lot of long-term ideas, but often did not work with the developers to meet those, rather focusing on the other two teams. The policy makers were pivotal in facilitating that communication as when aligned, decisions were agreed quickly between teams.
- A broader range of ideas were generated, and considered, when teams worked together. These included the ‘two in one’ build in round three, which combined extra care and a care home on one site, a ‘hub and spoke’ model which included a community centre, co-housing, multigenerational options and options for temporary housing to support those at highest risk of homelessness.

What can be achieved with a housing partnership

- Sometimes the best discussions were held round the main table when all the players were together, rather than when they split up to discuss plans with other teams. It highlighted how essential bringing everyone together some of the time could be.

Understanding other team’s priorities and pressure points facilitates good decision making

- The developers balanced their need for income and profit with what they were being asked to build. They felt other teams did not appreciate it took time to submit planning applications so last minute changes were not always possible.

An informed housing strategy early on would help when with budget pressures and changes in community need

- The policy makers received feedback after each round as to how the other teams thought they did. They also had a budget to balance that decreased while the needs of people in Hopetown rose, and it was not possible to meet all needs. Shorter term decisions started to overtake longer term ones as the budget tightened.

Setting priorities at the game and workshop

At the end of the third round of Hopetown, everyone came out of their Hopetown roles for a debrief in which they shared their learnings from the game, challenges and opportunities they faced and insights. All the participants filled in an evaluation form on the day to elaborate on what their priorities were during the game and to what extent they were able to achieve their goals, and any barriers that occurred. People also had the opportunity to address what they felt Southwark should prioritise when planning for housing for older adults.

On day after the game, the project team met and shared their observations from the day. It was a chance to share key insights on what issues teams were more keen to solve.

Initial insights and priorities for Southwark, identified in the game and the feedback forms, were presented at the workshop and attendees selected which priorities they felt were most important in moving forward with a housing plan for older people.



The evaluation activities

This evaluation drew on a range of data and information:

- 1 Notes from the game – these notes included detailed observations of interactions and body language, and direct quotes from game participations during and in between the rounds.
- 2 Debrief transcriptions – each team had an allocated audio recording device to record what was being shared during the debrief which were then transcribed and imported into coding software, along with the notes with the game.
- 3 On-the-day feedback forms – these captured people's aims in playing the game, barriers and learning from the day, as what they felt the key priorities for Southwark were.
- 4 Workshop priorities – all responses from the evaluation form on the day of the game were summarised by the serious games team, and participants from the workshop each voted on their top three priorities.
- 5 12-15 week follow-up interviews with five participants.
- 6 12-15 week follow-up survey of people who attended Hopetown and/or workshop.






Shaping Southwark's priorities

At the end of Hopetown, participants were asked to share what they believe should be Southwark's priorities for housing for older adults. These were collated to create a single list of priorities. Attendees at the follow-up workshop, including residents of the almshouse Appleby Blue, were then given the opportunity to select three top priorities which they felt should be urgently addressed and add more if they wanted. Three months later, people who completed the survey were asked to score by the level of importance as either low, medium, or high. These were collated and divided into two groups:

- 1) Priorities for what participants felt the plan should contain – the 'what'.
- 2) Priorities as to ways of working to develop and deliver that plan – the 'how'.

Priorities for Southwark's housing plan: the 'what'

First level priority

-  Co-produce a housing plan that meets the needs of a diverse community.
-  Supporting people with dementia and chronic conditions with proactive dementia support and aids, adaptations and retrofits.
-  Investment in different types of housing with the development of a range of housing models and budget options in Southwark. Prioritising accessible housing with aids and adaptations.
-  A needs-based and person-centred approach for rehousing older adults within their communities and neighbourhoods.
-  Becoming proactive and preventative in approach as opposed to reactionary in responding to crises.

Supporting people living with dementia

Suitable housing for people living with dementia was amongst the top three recommendations from Hopetown, the workshop and follow-up evaluation, particularly by the older residents who attended the workshop. One interviewee advocated for the need for independent living provisions for people with dementia, similar to sheltered accommodation. There is also the recognition that housing for people living with dementia should be culturally appropriate, requiring sensitive decision-making.

"We need more provisions and independent living for dementia, making sure that the housing is culturally appropriate because there are trade-offs that need to be made and they can be made more sensitively." (Hopetown player)

Throughout the game, there was the recognition that planning for dementia is lacking, and the crisis is also acknowledged as people's situations were becoming more complex throughout the day. However it was also the case that there was the lack of proactive planning, and this is something that people were asked about in conversations after the game especially as there was a call for more community-wide planning on the day of the game.

Investing in accessible housing

It was highlighted by players that within existing housing stock, accessible homes are scarce – not only for older adults but at all ages, with older adults being the group most likely to need them. The need for more new builds to be accessible from the start, was highlighted.

In the game, players found it hard to balance wider community needs (services and transport) with individual residents' needs for accessible housing.

Service provider 1 – “I would like to know how place enhancements would benefit the wellbeing of all the people around. What if you can't step down from the bath and go down the stairs or recognise the area much?”

Service provider 2 – “Well I guess it'll be a case of I have a great view outside, but I just won't be able to get out of the bath!”

Second level priority

- 🏠 Advice and Information – creating services that provide older adults and their families and carers information on housing advice, care, and support available for residents in Southwark across tenure (social, private rent, homeownership).
- 🏠 Invest in aids and adaptations to focus on current housing, improving suitability of housing for older adults. Simplify the existing aids, adaptations and retrofit processes.
- 🏠 Surrounding area - prioritise neighbourhood and place planning to invest in the areas that need it most and avoid increasing inequalities between areas and groups.
- 🏠 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.

Third level priority

- 🏠 Further research, data and evidence into the current housing provisions for older adults in Southwark. Include a focus on inter-generational and inter-cultural provision.
- 🏠 Tackle the 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.
- 🏠 Ensuring that older adults have access to wider communities and safe accessible streets
- 🏠 Surrounding area – prioritise neighbourhood and place planning to invest in the areas that need it most and avoid increasing inequalities between areas and groups.

Priorities for ways of working to develop and deliver a housing plan: the 'how'

- 🏠 Ensuring a collaborative approach between local authority and organisations in Southwark, and working on a co-production plan in directing a housing plan that meets the needs of a diverse community.
- 🏠 Develop mechanisms that support co-production within the community to better understand diverse needs and groups and how they can be supported.
- 🏠 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.
- 🏠 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 hospital discharge is planned more proactively and happens earlier.
- 🏠 Working together – focus on partnership working to support housing transitions, making them smoother and more effective for older people, supporting individuals in health and housing (such as homelessness, delayed discharge, etc.).
- 🏠 Creating a multi-agency plan to deliver housing options, with KPIs

Promoting equality

A thread running throughout the day was that of equality. This was in relation to people from different ethnic backgrounds, but also in terms of income, area lived in, housing stigma, and the types of support a person needed (for example people with dementia often lacked options).

In the game, the conversations involved developers, policymakers, and service providers discussing the need to address inequalities between different geographic areas, avoiding the creation of “ghettos”, and ensuring equitable spaces. There was mention of the challenges faced by ethnic minorities and a desire to understand the diverse needs of communities.

Throughout Hopetown, there was an importance on focusing on deprived areas, creating visual aids for navigation, and adapting designs to promote equality. There are also reflections as to how hard it was to meet individual needs while aiming to decrease overall inequality. In the game those in the community with the most resources could have a greater impact on decisions as they could pay directly for what they needed.

At the end of the day there was a discussion around redesigning homes and environments to benefit ethnic minorities, and considerations for accessibility that are culturally appropriate.

Working together – collaboration between different stakeholders

The game play required teams to communicate and collaborate to make decisions and meet the needs of the people of Hopetown. This did not always go to plan, with issues being:

- Parallel conversations between teams with different decisions reached in each
- Teams missed out of decision-making entirely
- Including teams too late in the process
- Decisions having to be made in a rush due to the round ending

“Service providers are not coming to us, in turn one they asked where we were and expected community to go to them. In turn two they were joined by two community people but were more focussed on what the policy people were offering. We questioned how they knew what services were ended if they didn't ask the community. Eventually we got them to the map and they were more engaged in turn three.” (Community team)

Teams learnt from earlier rounds and new ways of working were forged as time went on. In the feedback and interviews, players reflected on what they had experienced in the game to collaboration and partnerships in their work.

“The magic happens when we're talking to each other, and negotiation, partnership working, that's what really makes it makes that happen. I love that. So it's more of a communication. And that is a key point of improving the wellbeing of people”

“Talk to the other people who operate in the same system as you. And then it's also better if you're ultimately trying to achieve the same thing, then you should all be talking. You should all be having conversations together as frequently as possible.”



What happened next and the impact of the 'Serious Game'

This section focuses on the follow-up survey and interviews which took place 12-15 weeks following the game play and workshop.

Forming new and developing existing links and relationships

Of the 13 people who responded through our survey, five answered that they had further developed existing links, connections or collaborations as a result of attending the serious games/workshop. Six people answered that they have formed new links, connections or collaborations as a result of attending the serious games or workshop.

Since Hopetown there has been a reported softening of relationships where organisations and partners have reached out to one other to organise events and initiatives, asking for advice on best practice and input from one another.

“Serious games has made a difference to that because people are reaching out more than they were before and conversations are working differently. Council staff are reaching out a bit more to the voluntary sector partly because we've pushed them, so they're actually starting to put more teeth into the work they do with us and trying to put more realistic money to help us.” (Charity CEO)




Non-council participants also reported that the way they now view existing groups and partnership has changed as they now have improved relationships with some in the group, but also a better understanding of some of the roles of others in those groups. Existing groups are now seen as a good platform to collaborate and share ideas and plans following the serious game due to being aware of new connections made at the game and workshop.

An existing housing-related group led by a council department has expanded to include more stakeholders, following the game and contacts developed there:

“That was a mixture of more different groups from internal, but also some health and also. Provide a community type groups as well, like at the game.” (Council staff)

This reflects the activity seen in the room at the game and the workshop. People were swapping contact information, finding out about what kind of activities they were involved in and a general appreciation as to what all the different organisations and roles could bring to a housing plan. Some people in the room were already well connected with many of the other attendees, but for others, most people they met were no known to them until that day.

Following Hopetown:

-  A number of organisations or teams reported being more aware of the work of Partnership Southwark and their frailty strategy steering group.
-  There was work with a co-creation team at a large housing provider to develop new aids and adaptations policy.
-  Teams are working in collaboration with Southwark Pensioners Centre and Public Health to plan a health, housing and well-being event for older residents.

- 🏠 A number of organisations or teams reported they are, or plan to work more closely with HACT and with United St Saviours charity.
- 🏠 United St Saviour's charity and the Housing LIN are working closely together to disseminate information on how stakeholders across the housing and ageing sectors can improve social housing for older people, based on the Appleby Blue model.
- 🏠 There have been meetings within council teams to plan how to improve communication with other teams/stakeholders going forward.

Not everyone formed new relationships however and one stated that although colleagues across the sector are willing to collaborate and partner with, time is a barrier to form new and develop existing work together, as it takes time to understand new systems and the roles people have.

“The ones I knew beforehand have continued but I haven't felt anyone else reaching out. Because of the nature of the organisation, [I'm] invited to give views on something or to get older people to give their views on it. I wouldn't say it's changed.” (Charity CEO)

Southwark's older people's housing strategy

At the time of the follow-up evaluation in early 2024, a more detailed proposal for what a housing strategy would involve and include was being put forward with an expectation this would be underway in 2024. The process of getting to the point where developing a strategy could start was reasonably slow-paced, needing various approvals. An outline project plan was in place to develop a 5-10 year strategy. The focus was on being more joined up in the approach. While it was not clear at this stage who would be involved in developing the plan, related meetings were being had across council departments and with wider Southwark stakeholder groups that were part of the game. Some organisations that were part of the game have also been asked to be a sounding board for some of the initial plans to develop a strategy.



Key learning for players

Three months on, people reflected on what had been the key learning or insights for them.



Making headspace for strategic thinking

People mentioned that Hoptown gave the “*opportunity to generate, repurpose, and think again*” about ageing in place. As in the game day-to-day activities and pressures can make it hard to take the time to strategize. Making that time, with the right people, was a learning point.



Perspective taking

The most common comment on the day and in the feedback, was that the game forced people to take another job role perspective from their usual one. By shifting perspectives, some players felt they could now better understand the priorities of other Southwark stakeholders.

“People who've got to come at things from a different perspective, different angle, you've got different outcomes in mind and you start to understand things from their perspective and what they're trying to achieve. And you can explain to them what you're trying to achieve, then between you, you can come up with a better solution. So that relationship building, that patience, that listening, that willingness to understand things from a different perspective was in the serious game. And I think absolutely the need to continue that.” (Game player)



Motivation to collaborate with more stakeholders

Players reported that the game had reminded them of the importance of networking and building new connections, and this was within the council, across the non-council stakeholders and between the council and non-council groups.

The game encouraged organisations to discuss potential collective work with partners across Southwark.



Enabling choice and control

Players commented on the inclusive ethos of the game. There was key learning around the importance of ensuring person-centred approaches to housing for older adults, enabling choice and control for people in Southwark. This related to having a culture of co-production, whereby this person-centred approach would be more likely to be achieved with meaningful co-production.

Those who had been in the community team recalled how frustrating it could be, to be excluded from decision making when they had the best overview of what the community needed. Similarly, those across teams, recognised that including the community early on in conversations was essential and that some people in Hoptown had very few options and so lacked choice and control. A stand-out image was a Hoptown resident who 'had' to move into a care home, even though their needs did not yet require it.

Identifying gaps and work yet to be done

The follow-up survey and interviews were only 12-15 weeks after the game, not enough time for many planned next steps to be taken. Players reflected that the game had set a higher bar to anticipated next steps in housing planning for older people in Southwark. Stakeholders highlighted that a multi-layered approach to addressing housing challenges, involving collaboration between departments, consideration of residents' perspectives, and a shift toward more inclusive and accessible housing options was needed. This required proactive planning, data-driven decision-making, and ongoing dialogue between all groups. While those in the local authority were keen to include more stakeholders in their work on housing for older people, and provider, community groups and other stakeholders stated they would appreciate 'a seat at the table' some, but not all of those structures were now in place.

One player was also keen to note that one take-home from Hoptown was that striving for perfection was not the right mindset, but rather being aware how much could be achieved together, to make things better than they currently are, but being aware that there will still be gaps in provision. There is never an end point, but rather a set of timepoints.



Learning for future serious games

This project was a pilot of Hopetown for the purposes of supporting Southwark to bring together a local housing partnership and move forward in their journey of developing and housing strategy for older people. Feedback about the game, highlighted some ways in which it could be further developed in future.



Game play

Not all of the players liked the gaming approach or taking on a different role to their usual one. Some people felt it had a lot of complex mechanisms to grapple with, while others felt it was far removed from the reality of their job and so hard to connect it to real life learning.



Better representation

It was noted that there was a lack of involvement from older adults in Southwark in the game. The information being shared at the workshop was removed from residents' daily experiences at the almshouse Appleby Blue and so not easy for them to contribute fully to. In future it will be helpful to work with local areas to decide how best to include older people, either in the game or in planned follow-up activities – or indeed, other games.

This linked to the observation that the ethnic representation at the game and workshop was in stark contrast to the demographic of Southwark. This lack of representation could impact the effectiveness of decisions and solutions. This lack of diversity was highlighted in player's emphasis on the importance of co-production, though it would require co-production to actively engage with and support diverse groups to participate.



Busy schedules

Not everyone who wanted to attend the game or workshop was able to, usually due to busy diaries or last-minute pressing matters to respond to. The possibility of the follow-up workshop or other another related activity being online and shorter could help more people to be involved.



Conclusions

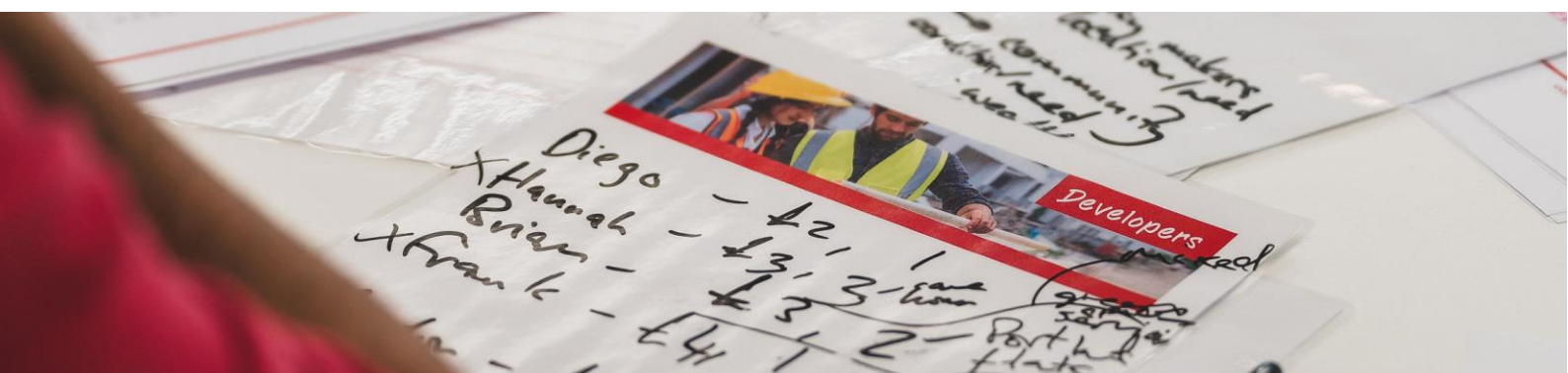
Hopetown is an evidence-based serious game that has previously been used with national level policy-makers and a version of which has been developed and piloted in Southwark.

The pilot demonstrated that Hopetown can help to bring together and support the development of a local housing partnership. Though at times challenging in terms of planning, a wide range of stakeholders from across Southwark as well as representative of key teams from within Southwark Council, were brought 'into the room' where the energy and cross-organisation working was palpable. As a result some existing relationships have further evolved or been built on and new ones have been developed. This has had some impact on the shape of the council-led meetings that will be part of developing a new housing strategy for older people. It has also expanded the information sharing and understanding across stakeholders in relation to housing and other aspects of support for older adults, which can help with day-to-day planning, decision making and sharing of practice.

Hopetown and the follow-up workshop provided Southwark with a starting point in terms of priorities for a housing plan itself and for the ways of working in developing and delivering that plan. The game alone cannot ensure the direction that the plan and how it develops then takes, but rather provides learning and insights to key leaders as well as demonstrating that some of the work can be shared – many stakeholders have expertise, data and information that can help.

In Southwark, the game and workshop attendees did not represent the ethnic diversity of the people living there, a potential weakness of the priorities and planning. This was a concern of leaders in the room who related that limited diversity to the need for co-production of any plan, so as to include the diverse voices of older people.

Hopetown is a novel and effective method for local areas who are considering or starting work on a housing plan strategy for older people. By bringing people together, breaking down silos and enabling headspace for strategic things, it acts as a springboard to building the partnership needed for developing and delivering any plan.



If you are interested in playing or hearing more about Hopetown and other Serious Games please contact Professor Vikki McCall, Creative Director and co-founder of Socialudo on vikki@socialudo.org

You can find more detailed information about Socialudo on this [website](#) that outlines the use of the innovative serious game methodology. If you would like to learn more about serious games, [please watch this video](#). Serious gaming is very visual, and here is a video that shows one of our playtests in action (click the [video](#) to go to YouTube).



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