Blackwood
homes | care | support

Independent Living:
The Blackwood Blueprint

Blackwood Homes and Care
2025

The Blackwood Blueprint
Table of Conents

The Blackwood Blueprint
Chair Foreword

When I joined Blackwood in 2019 work on the Peoplehood programme was in the beginning stages. Part funded by a grant from Innovate UK, Peoplehood was an exciting £12.5 million project that brought together private and public sector organisations with academics to develop products, services and business models to support people to live independently for an additional five years. It was an inspiring example of how Blackwood has sought for over fifty years to deliver the mission established by its founder, Dr. Margaret Blackwood, to support people living with disabilities. Another example of Blackwood's innovative work at that time was the planning for 66 new homes at Charleston in Dundee, to be built according to the Blackwood House model. The Blackwood House provides accessible, affordable, beautiful and connected homes with features that support independent living for people with disabilities. Other ongoing initiatives were evidence of Blackwood's drive for innovation in the use of technology, including the Blackwood Design Awards, which encouraged the development of creative products that meet the needs of the disabled community, and CleverCogs, a digital system that provides access to services and can be customised for each user.

Julie McDowell

Chair, Blackwood Board

Inspired by these examples and keen to encourage the drive for innovation that is Blackwood's hallmark, I suggested that we stretch ourselves to outline a new, ambitious "dream" project that would test the use of technology in a novel way to further support independent living. Reflecting on Blackwood's recent 50th anniversary and the evolution of independent living during that time, the team instead came up with the idea of a "Blueprint". The Blueprint would provide a compendium of the significant learning and best practice on how to support independent living that Blackwood and others had thus far developed. It would share the practical applications of our approach to innovation with a larger audience. The Blueprint would also be used to stimulate policy development to improve the options for independent living. It would act as a call to action, challenging all of us to consider how to support the next 50 years of independent living. These were compelling reasons to prepare a Blackwood Blueprint and work began to produce the document you are reading today.

The Blueprint demonstrates that we have the knowledge and skills to improve how housing and care services are provided to enable people to live their lives to the full. We hope its recommendations and call to action are adopted and taken forward by government and all organisations and institutions involved in housing and care.

While the Blueprint is evidence of how much has been learned, there is still much more to do. I hope that Blackwood will continue to contribute - and inspire others to contribute- to innovate and use technology to help people live their lives to the full.

The Blackwood Blueprint
Independent Living - A Unifying Principle

Independent living reshapes the housing debate by putting people at the centre. It brings the focus back to what matters most: dignity, choice, and the ability to shape one's own life, whatever a person's age or circumstances. At a time when housing, health, and social care are under strain, independent living offers a unifying principle – one that connects these systems and reminds us that the ultimate goal is enabling people to live well in homes and communities that truly support them.

The Blackwood Blueprint on Independent Living is timely. It brings together evidence, voices, and insights to remind us that independent living is not an optional add-on but a foundation of inclusive policy and practice. It shows how housing organisations, policy-makers, and practitioners can work differently - through collaboration, reflection, and innovation - to make independence a reality for everyone.

I am so pleased to see such excellent evidence bases being drawn into the Blueprint. The inclusion of projects like DesHCA is a particularly strong fit, showing how research and innovation in design can directly support independent living. As Blackwood demonstrates, decisions in this space must be evidence-based, and it is encouraging to see the growing recognition of the vital role that design plays in enabling independence and dignity.

Professor Vikki McCall

Chair in Social Policy at the University of Stirling and Co-founder and Creative Director of Socialudo

As someone who has spent much of my career working at the intersection of housing and health, I know how vital it is that we bridge research, practice, and lived experience. Independent living is not simply about removing barriers; it is about reimagining systems so they are built around people. That requires courage, creativity, and a commitment to inclusion and thinking intersectionally.

I hope this paper sparks conversation, challenges assumptions, and inspires action. Most of all, I hope it helps keep independent living at the heart of how we think about the future of housing, because when we get it right, it benefits not only individuals but whole communities.

The Blackwood Blueprint
A Call to Action

Blackwood has been at the forefront of providing products and services which support independent living in Scotland for the last 50 years.

Through this history, we have learned:

- the importance of co-designing homes, neighbourhoods, products and services with the people who use them
- the value of technology in supporting independent living, again when designed jointly with users
- the value of prevention and early intervention in supporting independent living
- the need for a strong, skilled, trained and motivated staff team to drive high quality services

Now is the time to act on this learning. Scotland's demographics are changing, and the prevalence of frailty and disability increases with age. People want to stay in their own homes and Scottish Government is committed to supporting this, ensuring maximum independence for as long as possible. At the same time there are long waiting lists for accessible housing and medical adaptations as well as growing pressures on the health and care system.

We know that the way we support people to live independently will need to change which is why we have created The Blackwood Blueprint.

The Blueprint aims to:

- share our learning from providing independent living services in Scotland over that past 50 years to positively influence public policy
- highlight best practice examples in independent living services from Blackwood and others, showcasing the art of the possible
- raise the ambition for the future of independent living in Scotland and beyond through 10 key recommendations, setting the scene for the next 50 years

The Blackwood Blueprint
Recommendation

We believe that the delivery of the following 10 key recommendations is pivotal to achieving the aims of this Blueprint and advancing the provision of independent living.

Standards for independent living

1. We call on Scottish Government to introduce a set of independent living standards and practices for Scotland by 2030, supporting the aspirations of 'Housing to 2040'.[1]

2. We call on housing providers to accept and go beyond Scottish Government proposals to enhance accessibility, adaptability and usability of Scotland's homes,[2] through providing homes that enable people to live independently as their needs change.

3. We call on housing providers to involve people with lived experience in the design of homes and neighbourhoods to ensure they meet their needs.

Investment

4. We call on Scottish Government to increase investment in the Blackwood House and other accessible homes by 2030, to ensure the 24,000 disabled people on the social housing waiting list in Scotland[3] have access to a suitable home.

5. We call on Scottish Government to invest in a new adaptations system by 2030 that can respond quickly to meet people's needs, prevent delayed hospital discharge and support people to live independently. Reflecting the solutions proposed in the 2025 Intersectional Stigma of Place-based Ageing report "What's Next for Adaptations"[4].

6. We call on everyone to campaign for increased investment in accessible outdoor spaces that promote health and wellbeing for all.

Technology

7. We call on housing, care and support providers to continue to invest in easy-to-use digital technology, including low-cost connectivity, that enables people with low levels of digital skills to use digital products and services

---

1 A vision for housing in Scotland to 2040, Scottish Government, 2021

2 Enhancing the accessibility, adaptability and usability of Scotland's homes, consultation, Scottish Government, 2023

3 Enhancing the accessibility, adaptability and usability of Scotland's homes: consultation, Scottish Government, 2023

4 www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/OtherOrganisation/SFHA-ISPA-Whats-Next-for-Adaptations-Full.pdf

Workforce and skills

8. We call on care and support providers, supported by the CCPS (Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland) to:

   • campaign to increase the base rate of pay for support workers by 2026 to ensure social care can attract and retain talent
   • create new roles that focus on prevention and wellbeing to reduce the burden on social care and health services
   • champion the adoption of digital tools and technologies in care settings, making digital leadership an essential criteria of leadership roles
   • introduce career development pathways that identify, encourage and reward the development of essential digital skills

9. We call on the CCPS, SFHA (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations) and CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing" to create tailored training and support for the health, social care and housing workforces by 2026, equipping the workforce with the skills needed to support new technology.

Evidence base

10. We call on Scottish Government and housing providers, by 2026, to adopt the recommendations made in the 'The economic and social benefits of housing support report'[4]:

    • map and increase data on housing support to strengthen the model of preventative housing support
    • develop a national partnership approach to further understand the outcomes and economic benefits of housing support, to increase its impact
    • increase the visibility of housing support by constructing well-defined areas of budgetary activity

5 The economic and social benefits of housing support, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, 2023

The Blackwood Blueprint
About Blackwood Homes & Care

Blackwood Homes & Care (Blackwood) has been at the forefront of supporting independent living in Scotland for the past 50 years. Blackwood was founded in 1972 by Dr Margaret Blackwood MBE who campaigned for the rights and independence of people living with disabilities, with a particular focus on the provision of accessible housing.

We are a charity, a housing association and a registered care provider. Our main purpose is to provide high quality housing, support and care services to enable people to live independently. Our overall vision of Blackwood is to help people live life to the full through good quality landlord and care services.

We have more than 1,500 homes across mainland Scotland including three residential care homes. We support almost 200 customers through our digital care services and provide over 6000 hours of care in our customers' homes every week.

An important part of our work is to share innovative ideas, insights and opinions around independent living, including innovation in design and technology.

Over our 50-year history, we have worked with people to design solutions that enable them to live independently. Throughout this document we share our own independent living design solutions, created jointly with people in our homes and communities. These products, services, homes and neighbourhoods offer people choice and control over their lives.

The Blackwood Blueprint
What is Independent Living?

At Blackwood we believe that living independently means having the opportunity to lead your chosen life with equity of access to a good home, community, health services, care support and social life whatever your mobility challenges or disability. People have a right to live independently.

Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that:

- Countries should recognise the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others
- Countries should take measures to ensure disabled people can fully participate in the community by ensuring that:
- Disabled people can choose their place of residence
- Disabled people have access to a range of at home, residential and other community support services.[6]

Article 9 of the Convention also states that to enable disabled people to live independently and take part fully in all aspects of life, countries should:

- Identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers to accessibility, and take measures to ensure equal access to the physical environment, including housing
- Promote accessible technologies and systems, including the internet, and promote new technologies at an early stage so that they become accessible at minimum cost.[7]

The UK agreed to follow the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009. Scottish Government has committed to incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Scots law, as far as possible within the powers devolved to Scotland.[8]

Scotland's vision for social care support aims to support people to:

- live independently
- shape the services they receive
- maintain their dignity and human rights.[9]

---

6 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 19
7 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 9
8 Scottish Government web page, Policy – Disabled People
9 Social care support reform: vision, Scottish Government, 2019

In Their Words:
Participant Feedback

"

'Community is crucial especially if you don't have children or large family around'

"

"Our homes have peace and calm, with the option to be outside and see other people because of the way we're built into this little circle so we do interact. This is important especially when you have a disabled or elderly. My mother at 91 can walk out a front door and see people now where she couldn't before. No matter what time of the day there's always going to be somebody to give her a wave. That's quite important to alleviate loneliness and isolation and her neighbours help her practically too, clearing the snow and putting her bin out."

"

"Our house is perfect, wider doors for the wheelchair, easy access to wet rooms and I have terrific access to the garden which is accessible with raised beds. We, also, have communal space when we come out because it's a courtyard. People interact even on the passing rather than typical houses where they are in a row and the house is a box with a car out the front.

"

' I dont want to go into a care home, I want to stay independent...'

Additionally, through the vision of Housing to 2040 Scottish Government have shown their commitment to supporting people to live independently in a home of their own.[10]

Scottish Government launched a national programme of adult social care reform in 2019.[11] In 2021 the Independent Review of Adult Social Care emphasised that strong and effective social care support is vital to everyone and is an investment which enables preventative and anticipatory work and is a vehicle for supporting independent living.[12]

It emphasised:

- the importance of self-directed support
- the importance of nurturing and strengthening the social care workforce
- the need for a new delivery system, through the National Care Service to drive national improvement and consistency.

In January 2025 Maree Todd. Minster for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Support confirmed that despite work undertaken to date and an ongoing commitment to the creation of a National Care Service as recommended by the 2021 independent review, the proposed structural reform would not proceed. Instead, Scottish Government would seek to deliver the goals of the National Care Service through alternative means. A National Care Service Interim Advisory Board was established in 2025 to advise Scottish Government on potential improvements to social care, social work and community health services to help ensure they are consistent, fair and high-quality across Scotland. Co-design with the people of Scotland is central to the National Care Service approach and a people-led policy panel was created to support its design and development.[13]

The Scottish Government also reaffirmed in 2024, through statutory guidance. that self-directed support is the way that social care must be delivered in Scotland, in line with the law and policy. It highlights that Community Planning Partnerships should recognise the potential for the housing sector to collaborate and plan services locally.[14]

10 Scottish Government Housing to 2040 - https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/ documents/

11 Scottish Government web page, Policy – social care: reforming adult social care support

12 Adult social care: independent review, Feeley, 2021

13 Scottish Government web page, Policy – National Care Service

14 Social care – self-directed support: framework of standards, Scottish Government, 2024

The Blackwood Blueprint
Context

Scotland's population

Over 1 million people in Scotland had a long-term activity-limiting health problem or disability in 2011 – one in five people.[15] Recent research suggests that this figure has increased to around one in four.

26% Approximately a quarter of people in Scotland are disabled.[16]

80%+ The prevalence of disability rises with age. More than four fifths of people in Scotland aged 85 and over report a health problem or disability.[17]

20% Scotland's population is ageing. A fifth of Scotland's population is 65 or over, and this is increasing as the population ages.[18]

47% Across the UK, 47% of disabilities relate to mobility, with this increasing to 64% for people of state pension age.[19]

Women and people from ethnic minority communities can experience intersecting inequalities which further affect their lives.

- The 2021 Scottish Health Survey found that women were more likely than men to have one or more limiting long-term health conditions[20]
- In the UK, age standardised disability prevalence is highest among people from the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and mixed or multiple ethnic groups[21]
- In 2019, there was a 24-year gap in time spent in good health between people living in the most and the least deprived 10% of local areas in Scotland.[22] This gap has been widening since 2016

15 https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/about/2011-census/2011-census-statistical-bulletins/ 2011 Census: Release 2A, 2013, NRS

16 https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9602/CBP-9602.pdf and Scottish Health Survey 2021

17 https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/about/2011-census/2011-census-statistical-bulletins/ 2011 Census: Release 2A, 2013, NRS

18 Mid-Year Population Estimates | National Records of Scotland (nrscotland.gov.uk)

19 https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9602/CBP-9602.pdf

20 The Scottish Health Survey 2021 - volume 1: main report - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

21 https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9602/CBP-9602.pdf

22 Leave no one behind: the state of health and health inequalities in Scotland, The Health Foundation, 2023 Leave no one behind - The Health Foundation

The Blackwood Blueprint
Housing Needs

Disabled people face specific barriers to accessing suitable housing which is of particularly important in the provision of social housing. Across the UK, disabled people have higher levels of living in rented social housing and lower levels of home ownership compared with non-disabled people. More people in social rented housing have a limiting long-term condition (45%) than those in other sectors (14-28%).[23]

40,000 In 2018, research found that almost 10,000 disabled people were on housing waiting lists in Scotland.[24] By 2023, data suggested that this had increased to at least 40,000 disabled people on social housing waiting lists.[25]

20% One in five older disabled people (20%) say their current home is not suitable for their needs.[26]

80,000 The 2019 Scottish Household Survey shows that about half of all households with a disability do not have the adaptations to their home that they require to live independently. This equates to around 80,000 households.

55% In 2018, 55% of Scottish councils said a lack of funding for adaptations was a challenge.[27] The same research found that disabled people are often left waiting for long periods of time, even for minor adaptations.

In 2018, research found that only 0.7% of Scottish local authority housing and 1.5% of housing managed by housing associations is accessible for wheelchair users.[28] The same research found that only a quarter (24%) of Scottish councils said the data they hold about disabled people's requirements was good or very good.

---

23 Scottish Surveys Core Questions 2019 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

24 Independent Living in Scotland, 2017 referenced in Housing and Disabled People Scotland, EHRC, 2018

25 Data obtained by a political party through FOI requests - https://fifeconservatives.uk/index.php/press-releases/718-40-000-disabled-scots-stuck-on-social-housing-waiting-lists

26https://www.agescotland.org.uk/news/609-more-suitable-homes-for-older-people-needed-new-national-study-reveals

27https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/housing-and-disabled-people-scotland-hidden-crisis-executive-summary.pdf

28 Independent Living in Scotland, 2017 referenced in Housing and Disabled People Scotland, EHRC, 2018

In 2018, the Equality and Human Rights Council (EHRC) called for action to be taken across the UK to address the crisis in housing for disabled people. In relation to Scotland, the EHRC called[29] for:

- Scottish Government to introduce a national strategy to ensure that there is an adequate supply of new houses built to inclusive design standards and wheelchair accessible standards, across all tenures
- Scottish Government and local government to take action to improve the way data is collected and shared, both on requirements of disabled people and the accessibility of existing housing stock
- A requirement on all local authorities to ensure a minimum of 10 per cent of new build homes across all tenure types are built to a wheelchair accessible standard
- A fundamental review of Housing for Varying Needs – a guide used by house designers to make homes flexible to meet the needs of people with different abilities
- Local authorities to urgently address bureaucratic delays within adaptations systems, ensuring minor adaptations in particular can be installed quickly and easily
- The Scottish Government to increase the resources available for adaptations across tenures
- Local authorities to ensure housing, care and health services are fully integrated and sufficient funds are available to support people to live independently

In March 2019, the Scottish Government announced that the Housing for Varying Needs design guide would be reviewed. This was reaffirmed within Scotland's national housing strategy, Housing to 2040, which recognises the central role that housing plays in determining quality of life and commits to supporting independent living.

29 Housing and disabled people: Scotland's hidden crisis, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018

The actions set out in Housing to 2040 include:

- Reviewing the Housing for Varying Needs guide
- Increasing the supply of accessible and adapted homes and improving choice, particularly for younger disabled people
- Introducing new building standards to underpin a Scottish Accessible Homes Standard which all new homes must achieve from 2025-26
- An inclusive programme of retrofitting social housing
- Streamlining and accelerating the adaptations system
- Taking action to better integrate the work of housing, health and social care services.

In 2023, Scottish Government launched a public consultation on proposed updates to part 1 of the Housing for Varying Needs design guide and building standards and guidance.[30] This consultation closed in December 2023 and the findings remain awaited at the time of writing.

In 2025 Intersectional Stigma of Place-based Ageing published "What's Next for Adaptations?"[31] in partnership with the University of Stirling, SFHA, CIH, ALACHO and UKRI. The report considers the rising cost, complexity and demand pressures on the existing adaptations system and proposes a number of solutions to address these issues which were developed with individuals with both professional and lived experience.

30 Enhancing the accessibility, adaptability and usability of Scotland's homes: consultation, June 2023
31 What's Next for Adaptations SFHA
[https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/OtherOrganisation/SFHA-ISPA-Whats-Next-for-Adaptations-Full.pdf]

The Blackwood Blueprint
The Potential of Technology

Although there are challenges in meeting the needs of people to live independently technology now offers us exciting opportunities. Technology is a major opportunity to make it easier for disabled and older people to live independently.

Exciting advances in technology in the home can:

- **Help people control their own home environment** – Technology can be used to control lighting, temperature, appliances and equipment such as blinds, doors and windows. Motion activated lighting, temperature-controlled showers and automatic toilets can create a safer and more user-friendly environment
- **Help undertake tasks at home** – Task based robots can help with tasks like hoovering, mowing the lawn or cooking safely. Technology can remind people to eat, take their medication or undertake other activities or tasks
- **Help monitor health and safety** – Wearables and sensors can help remotely measure movement, breathing and heart rate, and voice technology can listen for trigger noises such as a yell or scream and link to an alarm system. Health services can remotely monitor blood pressure and other health trends, using technology, avoiding the need for people to stay in or be admitted to hospital
- **Support community and service connection** – Technology can connect people with others, from a distance. It can also help people access appointments with healthcare professionals

Technology is developing quickly and new opportunities arise regularly. For example, in the future robots may be able to help people with activities of daily living like getting out of bed, cooking or getting dressed. Many major technology developers such as Google and Microsoft are investing in accessible technology departments specifically to address the needs of the independent living market.

In the UK, an all-party parliamentary group for assistive technology explored how technology could help older and disabled people to live more independently in their own homes. It found that while there is real potential for technology to improve quality of care and support and enable independence:

- there are low levels of awareness among health and social care staff, and disabled and older people, about how technology can support independent living

- there is a need for regulation, standards and training to protect disabled and older people's rights as smart technology becomes more widespread[32]

In 2025 SFHA's Road to 2026: Homes Fit for the Future report identified that around 20% of people aged over 75 are using a community alarm or telecare service to support them to live independently in their own homes. This evidences that whilst there is still work to do to encourage the uptake of technology amongst older people and people with disabilities, there is an existing positive direction of travel.

Digital Health and Care Scotland is working to make the best use of digital technologies in the design and delivery of services. It's approach to digital technology starts with the Scottish Approach to Service Design[33] and the Digital Scotland Service Standard,[34] which aim to ensure that people are supported and empowered to actively take part in designing and delivering services. [35]

It recognises that the success of digital transformation is reliant on people's ability to know why and how to use digital tools. It commits to Scotland's Digital Inclusion Charter,[36] which aims to ensure that people are able to develop the essential digital skills they need to work, live and use services.

There are already a number of exciting projects and services utilising technology to help people to live more independently.

Digital Front Door

Digital Health and Care Scotland's Digital Health and Care Strategy commits to developing a Digital Front Door app for people to use as a single means to access their health and care information, and health and care services. The aim is to allow people to access, self-manage and contribute to their own health and care information online. People will be able to see information like their medication or latest blood test results, book or rebook appointments, and view appointment letters. Digital Health and Care Scotland has produced a health and social care data strategy which sets out the safeguards for the data held by the Digital Front Door.[37]

Connect Me

NHS Scotland has developed a range of remote health monitoring pathways called Connect Me. Connect Me cover a range of conditions including blood pressure, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, heart failure and irritable bowel syndrome. Patients use their own devices as well as some basic medical equipment to share information with health care

---

32 Smarter Homes for Independent Living, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive Technology, April 2022

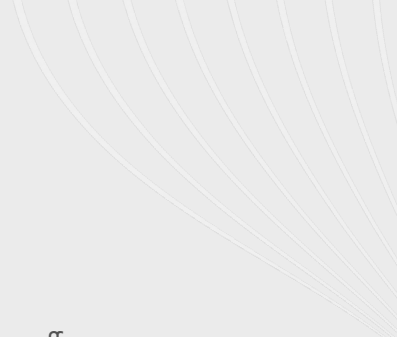33 Scottish Approach to Service Design, Scottish Government, 2019

34 Scottish Government webpage - The 14 criteria of the Digital Scotland Service Standard

35 https://www.sfha.co.uk/our-work/sfha-calls-national-accessible-housing-strategy-it-launches-homes-fit-future-policy-paper

36 Scotland's Digital Inclusion Charter

37 Digital Health and Care Scotland webpage - Digital Front Door

professionals and/ or automated monitoring services. Connect Me offers a way of sharing information and communicating with healthcare professionals, monitoring the effects of starting or stopping treatments, spotting flare ups, and exploring control of conditions.[38]

Technology enabling independent living

The NHS is introducing technology to help enable independent living. This includes virtual wards – for example in NHS Highlands and Glasgow – which uses technology to connect patients with support so they can receive the same treatment at home as they would on a ward.

Virtual cottage hospitals allow for people that have had to be in hospital and want to leave promptly, but need interim care, support or home adaptation before they return home.

38 Digital Health and Care Scotland webpage – Connect Me

The Blackwood Blueprint
Learning from our Approach

Blackwood has been working to support people to live independently for 50 years. Through our work we have learned the importance of taking an approach which:

- focuses on prevention
- co-designs services and products with people who will use them
- recognises the value and importance of our workforce 2025 research has evidenced how qualifications and reflective practice help to build empathy and person-centred approaches, leading to improved outcomes for the people we support[39]
- supports innovation

Prevention

Blackwood sees promoting healthy living and wellbeing as a preventative measure, and a key part of its housing and social care offer. We believe that we need to:

- shift spending and invest more in preventative programmes
- invest in homes that support us as we age
- co-design active neighbourhoods that have wellbeing at their heart

We were recently involved as part of the Advisory Group for a project exploring the economic and social benefits of housing support.[40] This research highlighted that although since 2011 the Scottish Government has intended a decisive shift to prevention, progress has been patchy and clearly takes time. The report set out the evidence relating to investing in housing support including:

- reducing falls and accidents
- reducing GP visits and unplanned hospital visits
- reducing loneliness and improved mental health
- freeing up resources in health and social care
- postponing the need for residential care
- reducing NHS costs for older people

This report highlighted that evidence was varied in terms of rigour, and suggested a need to:

- map and increase data on housing support to strengthen the model of preventative housing support
- develop a national partnership approach to further understand the outcomes and economic benefits of housing support, to increase its impact

---

39 McCall, V., McKee, K., Theakstone, D., Gallagher McCulloch, C., & Taylor, H. (2025). The reflective housing practitioner: the role of qualifications for building empathy and person-centered approaches in the housing sector. Housing and Society, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/08882746.2024.2448407

40 The economic and social benefits of housing support, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Excellence, 2023

- increase the visibility of housing support by constructing well-defined areas of budgetary activity.

At Blackwood we support the findings of this report and encourage others to join us in taking the findings forward.

We also believe that there is much greater scope to partner with housing associations to introduce approaches such as hospital at home and virtual cottage hospitals where people are monitored at home to avoid stays in hospital, or to allow people to come home earlier than they may otherwise have done. Housing associations have good connections in areas of deprivation and in communities which experience poorer outcomes.

Co-design

Co-design is at the heart of all our innovation projects. We believe that the best ideas come from collaborative efforts, and we embrace co-design, working closely with our customers and colleagues. Our approach involves:

- collaborative workshops – exchanging ideas, fostering creativity, learning from our customers and sharing ideas from different teams within Blackwood
- working with our customers as ideas develop – refining and developing the most promising ideas, developing prototypes, testing ideas and reflecting on our concepts to make sure they are viable and effective
- encouraging continual feedback from customers and staff to drive improvements in our business-as-usual activities

We think that this approach combines our knowledge, generates more creative and innovative solutions, accelerates the development process and engages our employees and customers in our work. Ultimately involving customers in the design process ensures that the products and services we offer meet their needs and exceed their expectations.

The importance of staff

At Blackwood we recognise the importance of our housing and care workforce and the key role staff play in empowering and enabling independent living. The ambition and motivation of the Blackwood team has been key to our success – designing and testing innovative independent living solutions.

At Blackwood we are committed to:

- involving staff fully in co-design of technologically assisted independent living
- investing in staff digital skills so they can test and develop innovations, and support, empower and enable customers
- empowering our staff to make choices and support others to make decisions, promoting autonomy and independence
- recognising and rewarding staff for the contribution they make
- support and fair compensation for overtime and unsocial hours, moving away from short 15-minute care visits

We know that the workforce will need to adapt as technology and an increasingly ageing population put additional demands on social care.

We are taking part in a project[41] involving universities across the UK, exploring how healthcare robots can be used in real life. The project focused on ensuring that the introduction or robotic systems sat alongside the provision of training and professional development for health and care professionals. The project recognised the vital role that care professionals often play in introducing new technology in home and care settings. The project involved exploring how care professionals learn at Blackwood, hands-on robot demonstrations, and testing ideas for new training methods with future workforces.

---

41 CPD Ecosystems, Facilitating the Emergence of Healthcare Robots from Labs into Service, ongoing

The Blackwood Blueprint
Supporting Innovation

At Blackwood we are passionate about using technology and design to drive innovation. We invest in and celebrate innovation in design and technology.

Our Innovation Team works to meet the needs of our customers and the emerging needs of the disabled community more widely as well as supporting organisational efficiencies.

In 2013 we introduced the Blackwood Design Awards which attract innovations and inventions from technology hubs, universities and others.[42]

Previous winners have included:

- An app that makes living spaces safer for people with dementia
- A spill proof spoon for those affected by conditions which cause them to shake
- An eye-controlled wheelchair
- An assisted flotation device for children with disabilities
- An all-terrain wheelchair with e-bike technology and an electric assistant
- A bottle to assist those with limited ability to administer fluid independently

Inventors pitch their products to a diverse panel of judges, including Blackwood customers, and others with lived experience. Winners receive prize money to help them to further develop their ideas, as well as having a platform to showcase their work.

"Each invention promotes independent living, which is at the heart of what we do at Blackwood." Blackwood Chief Executive[43]

More widely we work closely with Scottish Government, businesses, universities, innovation centres and public and third sector organisations to collate, test and demonstrate new solutions. We are keen to work with more partners and investors to create positive systemic change across housing, health and social care in Scotland.

---

42 Blackwood webpage – Design awards
43 Blackwood webpage – National award ceremony
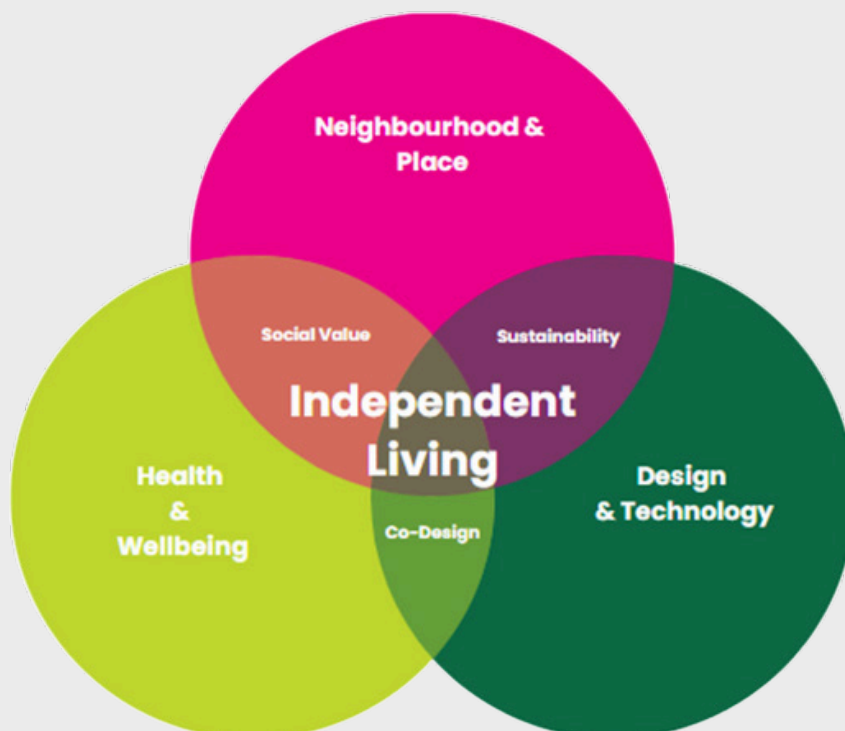
The Blackwood Blueprint
Blueprint Themes

Social housing, social care, health providers and the wider public and third sectors can greatly contribute to creating neighbourhoods, communities and homes which support people to live independently. In our work, the Blackwood Offer is our unique service model that combines housing, care and technology to promote independent living across Scotland. Many other organisations are also doing work to advance learning and thinking about the future of independent living in Scotland and overseas.

In this chapter, we explore the contribution we can make and the products and services that can support independent living under three themes:

- Neighbourhood and Place
- Health and Wellbeing
- Design and Technology

We will consider why each theme is important, what we are doing at Blackwood to support that theme and we will highlight some best practice examples from across the housing sector and further afield.

The Blackwood Blueprint
1. Neighbourhood & Place

The importance of home is Blackwood's founding principle. Dr Margaret Blackwood championed access to appropriate housing for people living with disabilities in Scotland and Blackwood today remains deeply committed to ensuring everyone can access a home which supports them to live independently.

And we know the impact that the right home can have. Blackwood's development of 66 affordable, beautiful, accessible and connected homes in Charleston, Dundee completed in 2024 with the first new tenants being welcomed during the Summer. Working with Hall Aitken to evaluate the impact of these homes all tenants strongly agreed that they will be able to live independently for longer than they would have in their previous home. Additionally we know that the look and feel of a home and its wider setting can help tackle the stigmas associated with disability and older age,[44] reinforcing Blackwood's approach to deliver homes which are as beautiful as they are accessible.

But home extends well beyond four walls – the community we live in plays a significant role in our health and wellbeing. "Our Place", a partnership between Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland, Architecture & Design Scotland, the Improvement Service and Glasgow City Council have created a Placed Based Strategy which looks at all areas of a person's life from housing to safety and influence, natural space, moving around, care, work and wellbeing. Our Place recognises that "our physical and social environment is the framework in which our lives take place".[45]

Unfortunately Blackwood's approach is not yet universal. Research by the Centre for Aging Better suggest that the UK has the oldest housing stock in Europe.[46] An overwhelming 91% of home do not provide even the lowest level of accessibility, leaving fewer than one in ten homes suitable for older or disabled people to visit, let alone live in.[47]

Good quality, affordable social housing has been proven[48] to contribute to:

- tackling inequalities – including reducing child poverty, reducing homelessness and providing inclusive options
- improving health and wellbeing
- creating successful places
- strengthening community resilience
- inclusive growth and job creation

---

44 McKee, K., McCall, V., Theakstone, D... et al. (2024). Understanding the intersectional stigma of ageing, disability, and place: a systematic literature mapping review. Housing Studies, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2024.2421844

45 Our Place, 2024

46 The Good Home Enquiry, Centre for Ageing Better, 2021

47 At Home in the Housing Movement, New Economics Foundation, 2023

48 The impact of social housing: Economic, social, health and wellbeing, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence and Housing Association's Charitable Trust, 2020

A Blackwood Focus:
The Blackwood House

At Blackwood we bring strong learning about how to design houses and communities to support independent living and bring about these wider benefits.

**The award-winning Blackwood house is:**

Accessible - The Blackwood house is barrier free and adapts to the changing needs of the customer. It has a central core of kitchen and bathroom and a flexible circulation space which is adaptable to individual requirements. The circulation space can become a large open space more suited to wheelchair users Kitchen and bathroom areas are flexible and adjustable. For example, the kitchen is designed for easy use by a wheelchair user with rise and fall surfaces and cupboards, which can be used at the relevant suitable height. Hobs are induction, reducing the chance of burns. The oven door opens and slides in underneath so a wheelchair user can more easily reach the oven. In the bathroom, showers and sinks move along a rail system, moving sideways and up and down to suit the user. Toilets have water spray and air functions

- **Affordable** – Blackwood aims to keep costs low by maintaining simple design, using space effectively, using locally sourced materials and sustainable green technologies. We aim to improve the fabric of the home to rely less on expensive heating solutions. Homes are made with quality, robust, environmentally friendly materials that keep them affordable to run and give a cost-effective value when measured over their lifetime.

- **Beautiful** – We use modern construction methods and materials throughout. We make use of light to help the home feel more accessible and larger.

- **Connected** – We utilise smart technologies and our bespoke CleverCogsTM system to keep people connected and promote independent living.

The Blackwood House evolved through co-design with our customers and is rooted in their needs now, and their anticipated future needs.

Blackwood's online Design Guide helps us to share and inspire best practice. This sets out principles and recommendations that enable people to live independently which can be adopted by anyone to ensure homes are accessible and adaptable.
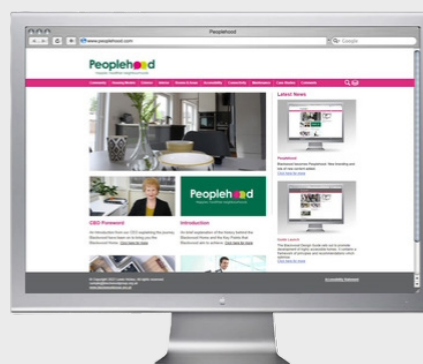
Project Spotlight:
Designing Homes for Healthy Cognitive Ageing

The Designing Homes for Healthy Cognitive Aging (DesHCA) project is based at the University of Stirling. The project, running from 2021 to 2024, involves exploring views of older people as well as architects, designers, builders, occupational therapists and local authorities to understand how homes could be designed to better support people with dementia or cognitive ageing (affecting the ability to think, learn and remember as people age).

The project found that there was a strong idea about what an age inclusive home should be. It should:

- Be designed to support people who experience difficulties with mobility, thinking or senses
- Be within walking distance of a vibrant, mixed-age community.
- Be affordable, and easy to keep warm or cool
- Be easy to adapt and change to fit people's needs and preferences.
- Be a beautiful, modern home

Using findings from its research, as well as existing evidence about needs and experiences, the DesHCA project has produced a wide range of evidence-based information and resources.

Importantly, the project found that improved housing design can help to postpone the impact of cognitive change.[49] It has produced a simple check list for age inclusive home design, with checklists for the approach, garden and each room in the house.

The project also explores how adaptations could be retrofitted to existing homes, to support older people to have better quality of life.[50] It learned that most (more than 90%) adaptations made to the home are in the bathroom.

At the time of this report, the DesHCA project was pulling together its overall findings, refining its designs and reflecting on how to move forward.

---

49 The impact of improved home design for people living with cognitive change, DesHCA
50 The relationship between cognitive impairment and home adaptation, DesHCA

The Blackwood Blueprint
2. Health and Welllbeing

Blackwood's vision is to help people live their lives to the full and we know that health and wellbeing, related but distinctly separate concepts, have a significant impact on what this can look like.

Scotland has the worst health inequalities in Western and Central Europe. The gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas is roughly 13 years for males and 10 years for females. The gap in the number of years lived in good health is even greater at roughly 23 years for males and 24 years for females.[51] Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People also noted in 2019 that there is lower mental wellbeing among disabled adults along with higher engagement is health risk behaviours.[52]

Through our 24/7 digital care services we are working with customers to support their health and wellbeing remotely. Working with customers with a range of physical and mental health challenges our staff are available all day, every day. Whether all that is needed is a bit of reassurance, a friendly face, a reminder to take medication or support if something more serious happens, our remote services give customers the support they need, when they need it.

Through our Peoplehood project we are learning the value of supporting social connections within the communities we serve. Following the trial of a range of products and services to support healthy aging across the three-year project, 40% of participants feel more engaged with their community and there was a noted 14% reduction in feelings of anxiety amongst participants.

Blackwood has a positive health and wellbeing story to tell. We have innovated to adapt our services to meet emerging needs and want to grow and share learning in this area. By building connections we believe we can reduce depression and anxiety, build physical health, reduce cognitive decline and increase quality of life. Addressing loneliness and social isolation is critical, through facilitating social activities, connecting individuals with community groups and using technology to foster social interactions.

---

51 Public Health Scotland, Enduring Health Inequalities 2022
52 Scotland's Wellbeing – Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People, Scottish Government 2019

A Blackwood Focus:
Peoplehood

In 2024 we concluded the trailblazing Peoplehood healthy ageing programme. Across three-years we worked with Innovate UK and nine partner organisations across academia, private and third sectors to develop and deliver products, services and business models to support people to live independently in their own homes for five additional healthy years.

Peoplehood focuses on three neighbourhoods in Buckie, Cardonald and Charleston, to engage with 500 members supporting independent living. The programme explores five specific healthy ageing challenges:

- design for age friendly homes
- supporting social connections
- sustaining physical activity
- creating healthy and active places
- managing common complaints of ageing

Through the Peoplehood programme we have provided:

- free to use internet access and digital skills support
- physical activity classes such as table tennis and walking football
- access to low carbon travel infrastructure such as electric cars and bikes to build confidence and encourage active travel
- co-designed outdoor spaces to support local communities.

In Peoplehood there is a strong focus on community empowerment and enabling people to be socially active and connected. Our approach involves considering:

- **Art** – Working with professional artists, using art and creativity as a tool to support the health and wellbeing of participants.[53]
- **Sport** and physical activity – Creating inclusive programmes for people of all abilities, ages and backgrounds to get more physically active.[54]
- **Hobbies** – Enabling people to take part in or rekindle old hobbies through digital technology and fostering social connections

Working with Hall Aitken an evaluation of the Peoplehood programme has evidenced:

- an increase in satisfaction and happiness
- a reduction in anxiety

53 This approach is in line with the Arts in Care programme
54 This approach is in line with the Changing Lives through Sport and Physical Activity programme

- an increase in connections with others
- an increase in physical activity participation.

Peoplehood was recognised by the Chartered Institute of Housing (Scotland) for Working in Partnership in November 2022 for the innovative and collaborative approach taken beyond the housing sector. The programme was also referenced in the Chief Medial Officer's Annual Report 2023 – Health in an Ageing Society.[55]

55 Chief Medial Officer's Annual Report 2023, Health in an Ageing Society

Project Spotlight:
Living Labs in Moray

The Rural Centre of Excellence for Digital Health and Care Innovation in Moray aims to enhance Scotland's digital health agenda. It's work includes <u>five Living Labs</u> (projects).

Two of the Labs explore supported self-management and long term conditions co-management, focusing on people living with diabetes and high body mass index. The projects allow participants to access diet and lifestyle management recommendations through a community connections programme, and links them to community services for targeted support. The project is also developing digital tools to link participants with clinical teams as required.

The third Lab aims to support easier access to social care services for frail older people and unpaid carers. It aims to provide a directory of local and national services in one place, which can be linked to a Personal Data Store. The Personal Data Store means that data entered into the system can be reused, to refer to services without the need for patients to retell their story.

The fourth Lab is a Smart Housing project which will build smart housing and inclusive communities in Moray. These homes will be a real world testbed for digital health innovations, and help older people to live independently in rural communities.

Finally, the fifth Lab focuses on mental wellbeing. It is developing and testing ways of tackling poor mental health and low wellbeing, with the aim of promoting wellbeing, enhancing access to services and reducing loneliness.

The Blackwood Blueprint
3. Design and Technology

Technology is a leveller: it enables people to remain independent, to carry out activities of daily living and to enjoy the things that are important even if health, age or disability are a concern. Technology also allows staff to work efficiently and effectively, delivering services in ways to best meet the needs of customers, directly supporting the National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes for Scotland.[56] In 2018 Scotland's first Digital Health and Care Strategy was published which recognised that the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland can, and should, be enhanced and transformed through the use of digital technology.[57]

As our population ages and the prevalence of disability and frailty increase the pressures already facing our health and social care sector will too – in March 2023 there were an estimated 152,000 unfilled social care posts in England[58] with 49% of Scottish care services reporting staff vacancies.[59] To best use the resource available to the sector we must embrace greater use of technology in the provision of our services.

Through our work with Heriot Watt University on the Robotics Knowledge Transfer Project we have had the opportunity to explore the applications of robotics in a social care setting. The project allowed us to trial the use of robots as a first response to alarm calls and to provide mental health and wellbeing checks between scheduled care visits, directly addressing how best to use staff resources to support customer outcomes. Working with universities across the UK we are also investigating how the provision of CPD and training will need to change to support care sector staff to deliver for customers using new and emerging technologies.

We believe technology helps to create agency and give people choice and control in how they live independently. With 39% of UK households currently using at least one smart home product[60] and 97.8% of UK households having access to the internet[61] the infrastructure and digital literacy of the UK is a solid foundation for the sector to build on.

56 National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes, The Scottish Government 2015
57 Enabling, Connecting and Empowering: Care in the Digital Age – Scotland's Digital Health and Care Strategy, Scottish Government and COSLA, 2021
58 Social Care 360: Workforce and Carers, The Kings Fund 2024
59 Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2022, Care Inspectorate 2023
60 Smart Home Statistics: Key Insights and Trends, Greenmatch 2024
61 Internet Usage in the United Kingdom (UK) – Statistics and Facts, Statista.com 2023

A Blackwood Focus:
CleverCogsTM

The Blackwood customer offer is delivered through our CleverCogsTM digital system. Our offer includes Wi-fi connectivity, a Blackwood tablet device and free digital skills training to support customer digital inclusion.

CleverCogsTM enables customers to access many of Blackwood's services online. It is customisable, and each CleverCogsTM device is personalised to the customer. The "cogs" of the system allow users to link to services like care, health, information, communication and entertainment. As part of this, CleverCogsTM can provide an option of simplified access to the internet, for those who do not have the skills, confidence or ability to so do independently.

CleverCogsTM also has the potential to support features such as automated medication prompts, appointment prompts, handover notes for care staff and an alarm facility. Our 24/7 digital care service[62] supports customers through CleverCogsTM, providing reassurance remotely during the day and night, in both planned and emergency situations. CleverCogsTM also allows us to support customers by:

- making planned calls to prompt or assist with practical tasks that can be undertaken remotely
- making contact if a home automation device is activated, to check if help is needed
- seeking health care advice in emergency services

The cost of CleverCogsTM to Blackwood customers is included as part of their rent or care package. The concept was originally supported by startup grants from Scottish Government and SCVO. An independent evaluation of CleverCogsTM by the Carnegie Trust[63] found that the system:

- significantly increased internet use
- increased the time users were spending on their hobbies
- increased life satisfaction and happiness
- enhanced independence
- reduced time staff spent on administrative tasks

---

62 Blackwood webpage – 24/7 and Night Support Digital Support Service

63 Living Digitally – An evaluation of the CleverCogs digital care and support system, Carnegie UK Trust, 2018

Project Spotlight:
The Care Technologist Project

Scottish Care has been trialling a Care Technologist role since 2022, to help people to use technology to live with more choice and freedom. It undertook a nine-month test of change project, followed by a 12-month trial to demonstrate the potential of the Care Technologist role.

Care Technologists work to create digital care plans to help people live independently, providing one to one support, access to technology and improving digital skills. This includes working with people to explain how technology could be useful, what they already have in their home (like smartphones or Alexa), what new options are available, and how to use technology to help them to live independently.

Participants are supported to use technology to help with simple adjustments, for example using smart plugs and voice commands to undertake tasks like close the curtains or switch the lights on or off. Evaluation of the project found that Care Technologists helped to promote independent living, overall wellbeing, support networks and enhanced health outcomes.

The project is also trialling proactive remote monitoring technology – called Interactive Lilli - used to monitor behaviour of vulnerable people. This involves non-intrusive monitoring which can identify subtle changes that might indicate a change in health condition. It involves a package of sensors which monitor daily patterns such as motion, eating, hydration habits and bathroom visits. By detecting a change in these behaviours, health practitioners can identify health issues proactively, and intervene earlier to prevent decline.

The Blackwood Blueprint
What Next?

This Blueprint serves as a call to action to re-frame how we think of independent living and consider what independent living will look like over the next 50 years.

To best support the changing needs of our society we must:

- set clear standards for independent living
- involve people in designing independent living solutions
- invest in accessible homes, adaptations and accessible outdoor spaces that support us as we age
- invest in digital technology and connectivity
- invest in and train our workforce – with an increase in the base rate of pay, new roles focusing on prevention, and career development pathways that encourage and reward digital skills
- improve the evidence base – understanding the outcomes and economic benefits of preventative housing support.

There are fantastic, real-world examples of innovation and best practice already in progress. These are supported by ongoing research and innovation, positive joint working between partners and a strong committed workforce. There are already pilots, tests and trials for:

- well-designed and increasingly digitally connected homes
- communities that support healthy ageing
- accessible and connected outdoor spaces
- remote health monitoring, hospital at home and virtual wards.

Technology also creates further opportunities for supporting independent living. These opportunities can empower individuals and build autonomy, while increasing efficiency and freeing up pressured health and social care resources. We believe the next 50 years will create real opportunities with:

- **Data** – Soon the act of living our daily lives will generate data about our health through the likes of wearable watches and place-based sensors. We will be able to use this data to spot and anticipate problems before they get acute, and to intervene quickly and accurately if they do. Although we need to think carefully about how this data is used and shared, it offers real opportunities, particularly if people themselves have access to and control over it.

- **AI** – Artificial Intelligence technology can do things that normally require human inputs. This offers opportunities to use technology for things like intelligent monitoring of trends, personalised healthcare assistants, predictive analytics or to support care staff through suggesting the next

best actions.[64] AI needs to be introduced carefully but could offer real potential to support independent living.

- **Robotics** – Robots can already undertake tasks or be present to enable people remote triage or to help with a task. Future opportunities include assistance robots that could help with activities like getting out of bed, cooking a meal or providing support to get dressed; or robots that can predict needs and do these things for people.

These developments will create both opportunities and new challenges. These are best understood by working closely with our customers and we are committed to continuing to test and grow innovative independent living solutions.

We want to raise the ambition for independent living and encourage others to join us on this journey. People should be able to shape the life they want – and feel healthy, valued and connected. We can all take responsibility for delivering this change, through the homes we design, the products we provide and the policies we create.

Now is the time to act.

---

64 NHS England, Transformation Directorate webpage - AI in social care

Independent Living:
The Blackwood Blueprint

If you would like to discuss further please contact
stephaniesutherland@blackwoodgroup.org.uk