SFHA: Tech Forum Report

Introduction

Scotland is facing rapid demographic change, with a growing older population and widening inequalities in health, housing, and social care. At the same time, services across these sectors are becoming increasingly digitised. While digital tools have the potential to transform how people access support, significant barriers remain. Around 15% of adults in Scotland still lack basic digital skills, and many communities experience poor connectivity, affordability challenges, and limited awareness of what technology is available and how to use it (Audit Scotland 2024). Without action, these barriers risk deepening existing inequalities and leaving those with the greatest needs the most excluded.

To explore these challenges, the **Scottish Federation of Housing Associations** invited **Socialudo** to deliver a serious games showcase at the first in-person SFHA Tech Forum on 2 September 2025. The event brought together housing providers, health and social care professionals, and policy stakeholders to reflect on how technology can both help and hinder people's lives.

Two serious games were used to spark discussion and critical reflection: **The Pathways Paradox**, which simulates the contradictions and systemic barriers within housing, employment, and support services; and **GadgetMatch**, which explores how everyday technologies can enable independence, connection, and wellbeing. By 'playing' the issues, participants were able to step into the shoes of service users and decision-makers, surfacing insights about resource constraints, stigma, digital exclusion, and opportunities for more collaborative and person-centred approaches.

This report summarises the key themes from both game sessions, alongside reflections captured in group discussions and feedback forms. It highlights not only the barriers that persist, but also practical opportunities for change – from shared systems and one-stop approaches to inclusive design and the central role of lived experience in shaping solutions.

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Playing Serious Games to Get Serious About Tech

The SFHA Tech Forum session was designed as an interactive showcase using serious games to spark critical reflection on the role of technology in housing, health, and social care. On 2 September 2025, Socialudo facilitated two games – The Pathways Paradox and GadgetMatch – with participants drawn from housing associations, health and social care providers, and policy organisations and beyond.

Serious games are a form of research and engagement that allow participants to step into the roles of service users and decision-makers, making choices within simulated systems. This approach surfaces hidden dynamics, creates empathy, and encourages reflective discussion. Both games have been co-produced with partner organisations and grounded in real-world evidence.

Pathways Paradox

The Pathways Paradox was originally created in partnership with Social Bite to highlight systemic contradictions in homelessness and employment pathways. Based on lived experiences from the Jobs First programme, the game asks participants to navigate a Catch-22 system where finding a home depends on securing employment, but employment also requires housing. Players take on roles as individuals in crisis or as service providers with limited resources, illuminating the structural barriers and inequalities in accessing support (see: Socialudo and Social Bite, 2024).

GadgetMatch

GadgetMatch draws on evidence from research by Rolfe et al., Serpa et al., and McCall et al. (2023) and the game introduces participants to a range of everyday technologies- from jar openers to smart devices – through 'Technology' and 'Challenge' cards. The gameplay prompts participants to consider how these tools can support independence and wellbeing, while also surfacing the barriers to uptake, such as cost, stigma, and accessibility (see: Rolfe et al; Serpa et al and McCall et al 2023). We also saw a bespoke deck being used at the front line in South Ayrshire, co-produced with South Ayrshire Health and Social Care, South Ayrshire Council, and NHS Ayrshire & Arran (see: GadgetMatch Impact Report 2025).

Following each game, participants engaged in group discussions, and their reflections were captured through observation notes, a facilitated focus group, and written feedback forms. This triangulation of methods allowed us to capture not only the immediate reactions to the games, but also wider perspectives on systemic and digital barriers, lived experience, and opportunities for collaborative solutions.

Findings: Shaping the Future of Tech Together

Getting Excited About the Potential of Tech

The Tech Forum opened up a strong sense of excitement about how technology, when implemented well, can transform people's everyday lives. Through GadgetMatch in particular, participants reflected on how even small and inexpensive tools could foster independence, improve wellbeing, and strengthen social connections.

The game created a safe and engaging space to explore possibilities. Participants emphasised that

"the game is good at sparking discussion about what's available, the ways in which technology helps people, and how to integrate technology into people's everyday lives."

This helped surface creative ideas about how both low-tech and digital solutions can be used to meet different needs, from the very practical to the preventative.

Many participants valued the way the gameplay highlighted that

"it's good to see how simple gadgets can enrich people's lives."

This sense of possibility was linked to discussions about how technology could not only solve immediate problems but also support prevention and future planning. Importantly, participants emphasised that the most effective technologies are those that enhance human connection rather than replace it. As one noted,

"The most supportive technologies weren't the ones that replaced people, but the ones that helped the interaction elements."

Others pointed to the role of technology in bridging generations and strengthening communities, describing how schoolchildren helping older adults with devices could reduce fears around anti-social behaviour while building confidence and safety.

Overall, the discussions demonstrated that technology has the potential to be enabling, human-centred, and enjoyable. Participants highlighted how play itself helped to destigmatise the topic, "allowing for a future planning and prevention approach." By starting with everyday gadgets and lived scenarios, participants could see clearly how inclusive design and accessible innovation can foster independence, dignity, and connection.

Prevention and Independence

Participants strongly emphasised that technology should not only address crisis but also play a role in anticipating needs and supporting independence. By embedding preventative, data-driven approaches, services can intervene earlier and help people maintain their wellbeing in their own homes and communities.

"Stop thinking about prevention in black and white. Even 10%, 20% along that journey is good."

This future-focused perspective was seen as vital for shifting systems away from being crisis-driven. Technology was described as a way to highlight key needs, track changes, and enable timely interventions before situations escalate. Sharing information across sectors was considered central to this approach, ensuring that knowledge and data flows support coordinated action.

"Highlighting key needs and areas for improvement."

Gadgets and everyday technologies were also recognised as powerful enablers of independence. Participants described how even small, accessible solutions can keep people mobile, safe, and active, while reducing the reliance on overstretched services. By supporting daily living, technology can create confidence and resilience, allowing people to stay connected to their homes and communities.

"Anything you can add into the day-to-day that makes that difference is amazing."

Prevention and independence were therefore framed not only as strategic ambitions but as practical goals already within reach through the thoughtful use of technology and more collaborative, proactive systems.

Accessible smart phone

Easy-grip knife

Two-handled mug

The Burden of the System

While the potential of technology was clear, gameplay also exposed the heavy burdens placed on individuals navigating housing, health, and social care systems. In The Pathways Paradox, participants experienced first-hand how fragmented services, unclear pathways, and inconsistent rules create barriers to support.

Participants noticed how individuals were forced to repeat their stories multiple times to different decision makers, often resorting to emphasising trauma in order to be prioritised.

"Some players emphasise how 'sad' their story is to receive help – sympathy as a form of currency."

This reliance on sympathy reflects how inconsistent and person-dependent the system can feel, where help is contingent not just on need but on how well a story is told. Decision makers themselves also felt the strain of working within a limited system.

"Decision maker is not popular role - people seem worried about having the control. This perhaps shows an understanding of the inequalities within the system. People are aware of their existence but currently unable to coproduce effective reform. The stress of managing ineffective systems."

Participants recognised how systemic barriers meant that even well-intentioned staff could not meet all needs. Technology was discussed as a way to help alleviate some of these burdens, particularly through reducing duplication and creating shared systems.

"It would be really good to put all the information there so I don't have to repeat the same story again and again."

"Technology can filter where you go next, rather than you spending all morning and all your money going to the wrong places."

The session made clear that while individual effort and goodwill are important, systemic change is essential. Without joined-up, transparent, and collaborative approaches, people are left to carry the weight of navigating complexity themselves.
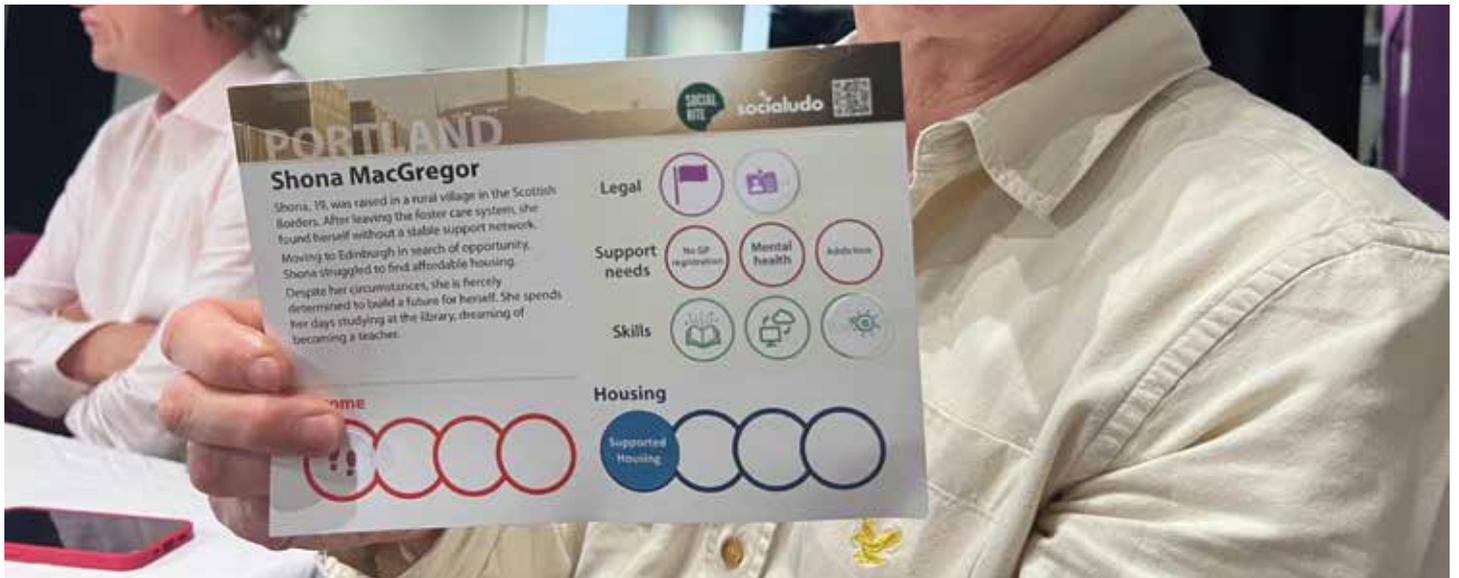
Pervasive Inequalities and Systematic Barriers

The gameplay revealed just how deeply inequalities shape people's experiences of housing, health, and social care — and the profound impact this has on individuals. Participants saw how where someone starts in the system makes a huge difference to the support they receive.

"Odds are very much stacked against certain journeys."

Players who had more skills or confidence were often prioritised, while "those who need more help are largely ignored or left to flounder." This reflects the reality that those with the greatest need are often the least able to access or benefit from support.

Scarcity of resources amplified these inequalities, leading to competition and stigma between service users.

"We're encouraged to fight each other for scraps rather than looking at the system as a whole."

In some cases, people's personal histories were used against them, undermining their chances of progress.

"As I got my three-star employment, somebody pointed at my [vignettes] addiction issues… an example of stigma."

The emotional impact of this is significant - individuals are not only left without support but also blamed for their circumstances.

Digital exclusion was seen as another layer of inequality, reflecting and reproducing wider societal divides.

"Inequality in society is replicated in the digital space."

Without access to affordable, usable, and trusted technology, those already disadvantaged risk falling even further behind. At the same time, participants highlighted that technology could be part of the solution if implemented inclusively. Shared systems, transparent data, and accessible gadgets can reduce duplication, remove unnecessary barriers, and ensure support reaches those who need it most.

"Somebody can give you a smartphone, but if the system still says you don't exist, it's no use."

The message from the session was clear: technology alone cannot remove inequality, but when combined with systemic change and a person-centred approach, it can reduce stigma, level the playing field, and prevent people from being left behind.

The Role of Lived Experience

A strong theme throughout the gameplay was the importance of lived experience in shaping effective technological and service-based solutions. Participants recognised that people's insights are vital to ensure that interventions are meaningful, appropriate, and responsive to real needs.

"Lived experience is crucial. But it doesn't mean everyone speaks with one voice – it shows the complexity of life."

The discussion also highlighted that lived experience cannot be the sole basis for shaping solutions. Long-term care users, or individuals new to the system, may not know the full range of options available. Professionals therefore have an important role in bringing ideas and knowledge into the conversation, working alongside lived experience to co-produce solutions.

"Sometimes people don't know what choices are out there – you need to give stimulus and ideas."

Participants agreed that lived experience should be at the core of technological design and delivery. Involving people early, sharing ideas across systems, and embedding ongoing engagement were all identified as essential for ensuring that technologies and services improve everyday life.

"Lived experience is everything - it is impossible to deliver solutions if you don't understand the problem."

This emphasis on combining expertise with lived experience demonstrates how inclusive co-production can lead to better, more trusted solutions that meet people's needs both now and into the future.

Inclusive and Accessible Design

Participants stressed that for technology to fulfil its potential, it must be inclusive and accessible from the very start. Accessibility was discussed in two senses. First, the design of gadgets and systems themselves - ensuring they are usable, adaptable, and sensitive to different levels of ability and confidence.

"Build in accessibility by design."

Second, accessibility was framed around equity of provision. Participants highlighted the need to ensure that all service users, regardless of income, age, or digital literacy, can benefit from innovation.

"Often those with the greatest need have the least means."

Participants called for inclusive systems that make data and support easy to access across sectors.

"It would be great to have a system with personal information that everyone can access and breakdown the barriers."

As digital adoption becomes more mainstream, it was agreed that access must become more equitable, supported by training, affordability measures, and joined-up systems. The most effective technologies were those that complemented human connection and gave people meaningful choice in how they live.

By embedding inclusivity into both design and delivery, participants argued, technology can move from being a barrier to becoming a genuine enabler of independence, dignity, and community connection.

Conclusion

The Tech Forum showed that technology is not just about devices or systems, but about people's lives and the choices they are able to make. Across the day, two clear messages stood out.

First, lived experience must shape effective technological solutions. Participants emphasised that without a deep understanding of people's day-to-day realities, technology risks missing the mark. Lived experience ensures that interventions are relevant, trusted, and usable, but it cannot stand alone. Co-production with professionals is essential to provide stimulus, share knowledge, and expand the options people can choose from. By valuing lived experience alongside professional expertise, we can design solutions that are inclusive, adaptable, and genuinely supportive of independence.

Second, preventative and data-driven approaches are vital for future independent living. Participants highlighted that technology helps anticipate needs before they escalate, identify points of decline, and support timely interventions. Shared data systems, accessible gadgets, and cross-sector collaboration were all seen as critical enablers. Prevention should not be seen in binary terms but as a continuum – even small steps, such as 10% or 20% of a preventative journey, can make a real difference. By embedding prevention into technological design and service planning, we can reduce reliance on crisis-driven responses and create systems that empower people to remain safe, connected, and active in their own homes and communities.

Taken together, these insights suggest that the future of housing, health, and social care must rest on two pillars: solutions grounded in lived experience and systems oriented towards prevention. Technology can enable both, but only if it is implemented inclusively, equitably, and with people at the centre.

Recommendations

Building on the insights from the Tech Forum, we recommend the following actions for housing, health, and social care partners:

1. **Co-produce technology solutions with lived experience.**

   - Involve service users early in the design and testing of new technologies.

   - Recognise the diversity of lived experiences – there is no single voice – and ensure different groups are represented.

   - Combine lived experience with professional expertise to expand options and build trust.

   - Share knowledge across sectors to create a stronger evidence base of what works in practice.

2. **Embed prevention and independence into digital pathways.**

   - Shift the focus from crisis management to anticipatory support, using data to identify needs before they escalate.

   - Develop shared data systems across housing, health, and social care to reduce duplication and streamline access.

   - Ensure preventative approaches are understood as incremental – even small gains can make a significant impact on people's wellbeing and independence.

   - Support households to access online services and everyday gadgets that foster confidence, mobility, and social connection.

3. **Prioritise inclusivity and accessibility in design and delivery.**

   - Build accessibility into all stages of technological design ('accessibility by design').

   - Ensure affordability and equity of provision, so that those with the greatest needs are not left behind.

   - Provide ongoing training and human support to accompany technological interventions, ensuring solutions are usable and sustainable.

4. **Foster cross-sector collaboration.**

   - Create collaborative spaces where housing, health, and social care organisations can align goals and share learning.

   - Break down silos by developing interoperable systems that allow data and information to be accessed safely and consistently across services.

   - Invest in knowledge banks of available technologies and best practice examples to support sector-wide innovation.

The Tech Forum demonstrated the power of bringing housing, health, and social care professionals together in one space to think differently about technology. By using serious games, participants were able to step into the shoes of service users and decision-makers, sparking conversations that might not emerge in traditional settings. The day highlighted that lived experience and prevention must be at the heart of future digital strategies, but also that collaboration is the key to turning insight into action.

Taking forward these recommendations will require organisations to work across boundaries, share knowledge, and commit to inclusive design. The Tech Forum is an important step in building that shared vision and in ensuring technology becomes an enabler of dignity, independence, and connection for all.

About the Tech Forum – how can you get involved?

The TECH Team: Technology Enabled Care in Housing Forum, hosted by SFHA, is a quarterly gathering designed to foster collaboration across housing, social care, and digital services. It's a space where professionals come together to explore how technology can support independence, improve well-being, and enhance service delivery for tenants. Whether you're piloting new tools, embedding digital systems, or just beginning your journey, the forum offers a supportive community committed to driving meaningful change. To join the conversation and book your place, visit the SFHA event page.

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