

# Step 4: Identifying older people's preferences and needs

## Introduction



This step will support you in conducting research into what local people want from housing for older people, including their financial circumstances, fears, and preferences. It will help you to develop a business case that speaks to people's needs and preferences, increasing uptake and reducing investment risks.

## What will it add?



- A detailed profile of people, including their circumstances and preferences around housing for older people to support you to prioritise the right mix of housing options in your locality.



## KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the key demographic characteristics in your locality? (Information from [step 1](#) can support this).
- Are there any groups of older people (based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic background) in your locality that face challenges accessing housing services and/or other local services? Ensuring these groups are included is key to developing a plan that is fully inclusive and supports diversity.
- What is the focus of the research in your area? Consider the topics, groups, and localities to be prioritised.
- What are people's housing preferences and needs? Consider space (living spaces to sit, eat, sleep, receive guests, enjoy hobbies), location (transport links, facilities, community), design (accessibility, functionality and efficiency, attractive, atmospheric), tenure (ownership or rent), and availability of services.
- What is the approach to be adopted? Will it be undertaken internally, or will it be commissioned? Consider the scale and methods to be adopted.

## How to?



- Establish the key areas that the research needs to focus on. This may include housing needs, health and social care support needed, demographic information, economic profile, geographical preferences.
  - Define the groups of people to be included, using criteria such as age and locality for example. Consider how diverse groups can be included to ensure that all local communities are represented in the data.

- Research into the housing needs and preferences of older people can be undertaken in different ways. Surveys, questionnaires, interviews (face-to-face, via telephone, or online) and small-group workshops or focus groups, are the most common methods. Consider an outreach approach visiting places, running engagement events and working in partnership with community organisations.
- In many cases, local authorities and local partnerships opt to commission an independent organisation to undertake the research. While this can be beneficial in terms of expertise needed and impartiality of the results, smaller scale research can be conducted internally if necessary and may offer other advantages. Either way, it is important to define an approach and a plan of action.
- Topics to be explored in the research may include:
  - Current housing - type of housing, if people are living alone or sharing, size, adequate number of rooms, outside areas.
  - Housing design and community preferences and needs – what people value in their house and in the wider community, where they want to live and with whom. What infrastructure and opportunities for socialisation do they need and what current and future hobbies and activities do they aspire.
  - Health and mobility – including level and types of support needed and if their current housing supports their health and mobility.
  - Economic circumstances – affordability, access to finance and funding, housing tenure.
  - Sustainability – energy efficiency, comfortable temperature in summer and winter, adaptable to support future changes in health and mobility.
  - Home improvements and moving intention – plans to refurbish and improve their current home, plans to undertake adaptations to improve accessibility and independence, plans to downsize or upsize.
  - Understanding people’s views on different housing options. Many people might not be aware of the range of housing options and the differences between them and so will need accessible information about this. This could include the benefits for each of the housing types as well as common concerns.
  - Work with community groups on topics for specific groups of older adults. For example there may be some additional or different topics to discuss with LGBTQ+ older adults, and these questions can be designed with those groups.
- Consider how the information collected will be processed and presented in the business case. Look for highlights and trends that represent people’s needs and preferences and give potential investors an overview of the local tendency on housing for older people.
- Research needs to be designed, analysed and interpreted in the context of the local housing market and the different groups being consulted. More specifically, it is important to be aware that people in different age groups are likely to have different views on different types of housing for older people, based on their current preferences and this may not accurately reflect future demand.
- Consider how you will feed back the findings from the research to the participants and highlight how the information gathered is going to be used.



## SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Toolkit and guide to planning healthier places and creating technical research papers in consultation with people.
- Example of strategic housing market assessment applied to a housing strategy: Kirklees Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- Population survey questions and responses for the Commission on the Role of Housing Example in the Future of Care and Support. Includes accessible descriptors of five housing options, level of awareness and perceived advantages and disadvantages of each type.
- AgeScotland's 2023 housing survey.
- Example of approach used to understand residents needs with respect to maintaining and improving their homes: Centre for Ageing Better, Putting ideas into action: Developing a local Good Home Hub.
- Centre for Ageing Better, Finding the right place to grow older: A toolkit for engaging residents in a discussion about their housing preferences and local communities.
- Local Government Association, Developing customer insight.
- Housing LIN CollaborAGE, Directory of community led approaches.



## PARTNERS TO INVOLVE

- Local older people's representative groups, charities and community groups.
- Local authority (LA) community engagement and participation teams, customer insight teams, and allocations/lettings, property services/surveyors.
- LA leaders focussed on social care and older adults.
- General and specialist housing associations and social care providers.
- Integrated Care Partnerships, community health, Occupational Therapists and mental health leads.





## TIPS ON CO-PRODUCTION

The 'I' and 'We' statements below are illustrative examples of co-production outcomes associated with this step. We encourage housing partnerships to adapt them as they see fit to best reflect their local context.

### For individuals:

- I define the key areas and topics to be covered by the research.
- I support the development of the questions to be asked to ensure they are easy to understand.
- I help decide which research approaches will work best with different groups and the important factors to consider for each approach (surveys, interviews, focus groups).
- I say what groups need to be consulted with and say how to make the process inclusive and accessible.

### For the partnership:

- We facilitate individuals' understanding of the research process and take on board their views on the key areas to be covered.
- We design the methodology and the questions with individuals taking into consideration their views on what should be prioritised with different groups.
- We develop an inclusive approach based on individuals' views on who should be included and how.

Further information about the benefits of and principles of co-production, as well as examples of co-production in the housing sector can be found [here](#).



## CASE STUDY

To inform the delivery of mainstream and specialist housing, Kirklees Council developed the [Housing Needs and Preferences Study](#), published in 2022. Conducted by Housing Learning and Improvement Network the study used a range of methods to engage with approximately 500 people from ethnic minority backgrounds aged 45 and over. The research methods included:

- Quantitative research - analysis of local data available to better understand the current and future housing and support needs of the older ethnic minority population including a demographic projection of the older ethnic minority population in the short, medium, and longer term.

- Qualitative research - engagement with older people from ethnic minority backgrounds through focus groups, targeted interviews, and online and paper-based surveys.

The findings provided an overview of current circumstances and needs and preferences of older people from ethnic minority backgrounds including the following themes:

- Current living arrangements - places of origin, housing suitability, specific cultural and religious needs, and challenges faced.
- Need for adaptations - types of adaptation and need for support and advice.
- Propensity to move home - proportion of people considering moving, types of housing needed, downsizing and rightsizing needs, location preferences.
- Factors influence the desire to move home - reducing costs, properties suitable for multigenerational living, preferences to live close to family.
- Important characteristics of home – enabling independent living, number of bedrooms, Wi-Fi, transport, and being near to people of the same culture.
- Barriers to moving home – affordability, lack of suitable housing available.
- Tenure preferences – proportion of people owning and renting properties, intention to buy, and tenure preferences.
- View about specialist housing for older people – understanding of options available, lack of options for cultural and religious competent services, stigma.
- Affordability – levels of affordability and concerns about financial security.
- Support services – changes to family support for older adults, incidence of early onset of dementia, access to culturally appropriate amenities.

Based on the findings the report outlines a range of recommendations to improve places, provide adequate support to older people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and improve services.

For further full recommendations, findings, and research methodology, access the full report: [Older People from Ethnic Minorities in Kirklees: Housing Needs and Preferences Study](#).

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Toolkit available at: <https://www.scie.org.uk/housing/toolkit-for-place-based-plans-for-housing-for-older-adults/>

