

## Through the eyes of the customer transcript

Customer Service Advisor: Good afternoon, you're through to Sovereign. How can I help today?

My name is Ruth. And I'm a member of the resident and board partnership. My name is Raymond and I'm on the scrutiny coordination group.

Residents tell us that getting in touch with Sovereign easily is one of their priorities. So we are visiting Sovereign's contact team to find out how it all works.

Hi, Georgia. Tell us about the contact service. What's its purpose within Sovereign?

The contact centre is the voice of the organization putting our customers at the heart of everything we do provide. It's that single front door for customers. We can solve problems and try and get that first time resolution offering multiple channels into the department such as phone email social media and soon to be webchat. It allows our customers to contact us in a way that they feel comfortable.

We all know the frustration of having to hang on the phone waiting for someone to answer. It's happened to me when I've tried to call Sovereign. What are you doing to improve that?

So we're continuing to recruit into the contact centre towards the end of last year. We did some work to ensure that our pay was competitive which helped our Recruitment and Retention of staff and we regularly ask our team to complete engagement survey. So we understand what's working well and what we can improve on. 74% of our team say that they would recommend customer contact as a great place to work. And this was up 10% from the last time we completed this in April last year.

Our average wait time was seven minutes and eight seconds in April this year that came down to 58 seconds.

What other day-to-day challenges do you face delivering your service?

The variety of course, some can be quite challenging we deal with a lot of mental health calls and this does have a knock on effect on advisors and also on our mental health first aiders. Advisor knowledge. They need to know so much around areas of the business. Unexpected peaks, so for example, our recent storm experience and also balancing and prioritizing the channels, so social calls and emails.

What are these screens for?

So these screens help us run our day to day they show us how many calls are waiting, how many calls are abandoned and also our current wait time.

What's the best thing about working here for

For me, it's actually helping vulnerable people that is very rewarding for me, especially the elderly the ones with disabilities, people with medical or people in a very sticky situation in that moment. It's very rewarding and then you are basically their hope, you know, and after finishing that call you feel good.

We've had a great day finding out about how Sovereign's contact team is working to deliver a great customer experience.

Hi, my name is Richard. I'm a sovereign resident and a member of the resident and board partnership.

Hi, I'm Alan and I'm also on the resident board partnership. We're here today at sovereign's new head office in Basingstoke to find out about the importance of their work on equality diversity and inclusion.

We want show leadership to the sector and diversity inclusion and be a leader not just to our setup but beyond this. We want to have a diverse workforce and represent our communities as best we can.

Our residents are all very different and if as board members, we're blinkered and say our residents look like this or they act like that, we'll never get it right

That's why Sovereign are always looking for people from different backgrounds to engage with. We offer support with things like technology and travel costs.

That's good.

To try and make it easy for everybody to take part. We've got to remember with every decision the effect that that has on our residents. You get input into strategy. We get input into reports. We get input into policies and procedures. I just want to make sure that those views are reflected accurately when they get to board level

We get the information directly from your experiences because at the end of the day, that's what matters.

Diversity representation brings diversity of thought as you've all said, so I think the more voices we have in the room, the better it will be for the organization.

Hi, I'm Danny. I'm a sovereign resident. I'm part of a small team of staff and residents that helps Sovereign decide how to spend its Community Development budget. I'm here today to find out how the money is spent.

Hi Rachel

Hiya Danny. So why we here today?

So we're here at one of our older persons housing schemes to have a little look at creative communities art classes.

Can you tell me a little bit about why Sovereign funds this project?

So this was a project that we funded as part of our Cohesive Communities Fund and really it was about recovery after covid and bringing people back together in this instance through art. So these classes are available for our Southern residents and The Wider Community to come in and make new friends and learn new skills.

So why do Sovereign fund projects and on the whole?

We've got a thriving Community strategy it puts residents in our communities at the heart of everything we do and as part of that community's team, we look at lots of different projects all with the aim of creating great places for people to live and giving opportunities for people to do things which they perhaps couldn't have done without the projects that exist.

Hello. Could you tell us a little bit about your organization and what you do?

We run art-based courses out in the wider community for well-being. So to improve mental, emotional, physical and social well-being. So we run courses similar to the one we're running here, which is in a Sovereign over 55 Independent Living scheme, but we also run courses for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities and older learners living in care homes in day centres, adults suffering with mental health. We run courses in schools for parents that might be struggling. So it's any adult learner group really that could benefit from some art therapy activity.

What's the funding mean to you?

Well funding is everything really we couldn't do anything that we do without funding. So it's vital to us that we don't charge our participants any fees at all. So we don't charge for resources and we don't charge for our time. We felt that there was a lot of courses for adults going on in the community, but the people that really needed to access them were excluded due to high tuition fees and quite often locations. So lots of courses were held in Newbury and Thatcham and adults here, people that don't drive wouldn't be able to access those courses. So we need it to be able to get out into the community and offer free courses. So funding is everything so we didn't have the funding we wouldn't be able to do that.

What do you get out of coming here?

I look forward to Monday mornings. It's bought me out a lot being with the art club.

We bring everyone together don't we? As you say, we love that art class and she's so lovely so we would love her to come back.

Today I'm visiting Sovereign's head office to talk about customer metrics with their director of housing Luke Bingham.

If you could tell us about customer metrics

Well it sounds quite complicated. But the reality it's fairly simple. It's just a suite of indicators and measures that we use to look at performance for our customer and landlord services across the business. So effectively tells us, all of them, how we're doing.

The resident and board partnership have been involved in those measures.

Oh, absolutely. Yes, we did a deep dive at the beginning to make sure that all of the things that were important to the to the partnership were included. So we came up with you know, some principles around simplicity etc. We also align them to the Regulators draft satisfaction measures and also to our own customer metrics.

What service areas are you including in that this year?

We divided them into four parts. So we've got home neighborhoods, safety and services. So for example in safety, we'll talk about compliance, in home we'll talk about things like repairs and services we might talk about things such as you know, overall customer satisfaction or antisocial behavior, for example.

That sounds really good, but it sounds like an awful lot of metrics people to look at. So when you thought about presentation, how have you have you done that?

Well again, we had to involve the partnership because some people love data some people love drawings, so it was about getting the balance. I think the important thing is it provided a kind of qualitative narrative. It allows people to see trends and most of importantly it allowed the partnership to have visibility of their core services and to allow them to challenge where we're not performing as we should be.

Oh, that's really good. Yes. We have used those in the meetings, and I'm pleased to say that we're able to hold Sovereign to account to provide that excellent customer service that is expected. Fantastic.

Thank you.

Danny and I are outside Sovereign's new office just outside Newbury to find out about the new facility and what this means to Sovereign's customers.

What's it like working in a brand new office?

Yes, so it's really nice coming back to a new office, a nice new environment where you see people from different teams. You can meet you know with your team just talk and collaborate and talk about projects. Where you can just sit and you can work alone. You also have like little

Pods where you can sit in and take you know, private and confidential meetings that you might not want people to over here on so, yeah, it's just nice and also we have a canteen as well, a place where you can sit and have lunch and it's just nice as well to take people away from sitting at their desk and actually come and sit together with other people.

It looks like it cost a lot.

But actually what we've done is we've actually brought five different offices and we put into one Hub. So it's actually more efficient in the long term.

We've all seen the new look Sovereign vans out and about, what do you think about them Scott?

I think they're brilliant. Um, I work as a carpenter and I've found ever since I've got the van from new that everything I need is in the van from the start. All the materials are correctly placed where I need them. So when I go to a job I can assess what I need, go to the van, collect the stock and do the job on the first visit. It's basically about us being able to provide a better service to the customer.

I met with Adam and Matt so they could tell me about Sovereign's new on-site training facility.

Hi, I'm Matthew Cooper Operations Manager. This is Sovereign's new training academy. It's currently being fitted out and we'll be ready in a few weeks when it's completed. It'll be used for trades practicing and upskilling so when we visit our properties, we get the right trade in and get the fix done right first time. It will ensure all our services are fit for the future and will help our apprentices when training requirements are identified.

Hi. I'm Adam Nolan Operations Manager. We've got the customer contact team lined up to come in and have a look at some of our boilers and water heaters. So they've got the knowledge when they are answering the phones to advise our residents moving forward. We're looking at offering the residents the chance to learn new skills empowering them to complete simple jobs in and around their homes.

Hi there. Hi, I'm Francesca. I'm part of the resident board partnership.

I'm a delivery manager for Sovereign and you'll be shadowing Jake today.

But first I need to find out how Sovereign schedules all the repairs.

What happens when a resident first reports a repair?

So what happens when a resident first reports a repair they call through into our call centre, which is based in Newbury and the call centre will raise the repair which will basically book a job in on our system which will assign it with a specific amount of time to do the job and one of our trade staff to do the work.

So what do you think the most important thing for operatives then?

Well, info for them to get when they do the job so pre-empt tools good tools polite, all the rest of it, you know, looking after the customer, customer satisfaction and doing the right repair first time and to a high standard.

Yeah after the first job of the day, what's the next thing for the operatives?

Well, depending on how the job went, they'll go on the job manager, phone calls into their scheduling to see where their next job is, do they need to pick up materials? So it's an automated system of job managers, so they close it down. And yeah, so they will do a report, close the job down pick the new job up off the manager. That sends an email to the next customer that they're on their way.

It's a very clear sort of clever system and then they make their way to the job and then start again as soon as they get there, so yeah straightforward.

What do you think operatives value most about their job?

Well looked after, clean and tidy. They've got a lot of pride out there and then the jobs they do, it does show.

Well as a resident I can only say that that your operatives are always amazing when they turn up and they do their very best.

They only want to do the best job they can and that's it. So yeah, very good and they do it they do it.

Thanks so much.