

Residents' annual performance report

2021/22



Introduction

As well as a focus on what still needs to improve, it's good to reflect on what we've achieved. Over the year, customers have worked hard alongside Sovereign staff on some fundamental changes that will help us all.

Customers have helped to co-create services and develop Sovereign's customer impact strategy. We've supported massive improvements in the Contact Centre. We've fed back on new developments like a chatbot for the website and video calls to help diagnose gas boiler and damp or mould issues.

Engaged residents have listened to phone calls and been out with trades teams to understand their challenges. This helps to give a customer perspective on how to improve these services.

As part of the Resident and Board Partnership (RBP), I've been able to help develop key strategies and policies and ask challenging questions about building safety. We've had input as well into difficult decisions on how to balance spending across multiple priorities.

We've encouraged and supported Sovereign's commitment to make more homes fit for the future by upgrading them so that they're warmer, more affordable to run and produce fewer damaging carbon emissions. But this won't always be possible or the best approach. So bigger regeneration projects may also be needed to create the great places where we - and future generations - will live.

Sovereign has been honest that its journey to transform services may take time. But I believe they're listening to customers as well as moving to provide more localised services and deliver on what most concerns customers in each area.

The Covid pandemic, the economy, the cost of living crisis and soaring fuel bills, also show why Sovereign needs to keep providing the expert individual support some customers need. Whether that's around jobs and training, money and debt or other help to allow people to remain in their home if their situation changes.

Our role as engaged residents is to 'get under the bonnet' of such issues and probe Sovereign on its customer services: from phone calls and handling complaints to repairs and anti-social behaviour.

This report gives you a flavour of its performance over the year, including how customers have helped to shape this.

Finally, as I get ready to hand over my role as RBP Chair, I'd like to say a massive thank you to all the residents and staff I've had the pleasure of working with over many years. But you won't get rid of me entirely!

Joyce Ward, MBE
Chair, Resident and Board Partnership

We hold Sovereign to account and ensure that our voice is not just heard, but listened to and acted upon.



About Sovereign

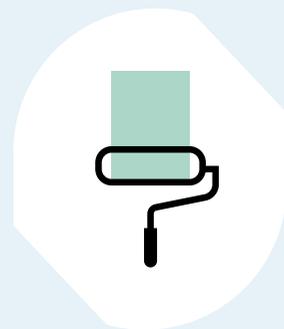
Sovereign exists to provide high quality homes and great services to residents and customers.

We maintain 61,000 homes, build new ones for people who need affordable housing and offer a range of housing and support services - investing in individuals and their communities.

We are also not-for-profit. This means every penny goes back into homes and services.

This report shares some key performance and other information that we think is of particular interest to our customers. You can also find more detail in the [annual report and financial statements 2022](#).

¹See [Annual Report 2022](#) for full details



Invested **£118.4m** into maintaining and improving existing homes - up from £102m the year before



1,196 families housed in new homes - 93% of them affordable to rent or buy



72% overall customer satisfaction for the year



£422.8m turnover and £86.6m surplus before tax - which pays for investing into existing homes and interest on borrowings



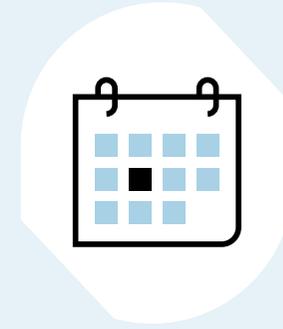
94% quality scores for Customer Contact call handling (target 85%)



£3.5m invested in communities plus £1.7m external funding - engaged with 10,000 people and supported 638 community groups and charities



In best performing **25%** of landlords on three value for money measures reported by the Regulator of Social Housing, and in the middle 50% of landlords for the other six measures¹



Average relet times **20 days** (target 25 days)

Investing and maintaining our existing homes



Repairs satisfaction
88% (target 95%)



Almost **220,000** repairs carried out during the year



64% repairs 'right first time'



70% satisfaction with overall quality of home - down from 78%



There was a big increase in demand for repairs with 35,000 more requested than the year before, and also above pre-Covid levels. Some of this demand came from damage during several severe storms.

Like other businesses across the country, we still continue to face some challenges with our suppliers, getting the materials for certain repairs and recruiting for key trades and other roles.

Despite this, we delivered good results and made progress on areas such as clearing the backlog of replacement kitchens and bathrooms caused during Covid. At the end of March, we had managed to complete 40% of the planned works and extra activity is continuing.

We're improving how we collect and use data, helping us focus resources in the right places and get more useful insights to respond to customer issues like damp and mould. [Reducing and tackling damp and mould](#) is a key focus area and this work was supported by installing smart home sensors and thermostats in over 400 homes.

A new property 'triage' team was set up to support and resolve issues for customers with existing repairs: by getting them to the right team, with the right knowledge, first time. Having a mix of Property and Customer Contact colleagues means they can use their expert knowledge and new call-routing options to resolve 64% of queries first time.

We're also working hard to improve our service to customers when we don't get things right. This included making changes to support the repairs service across Hampshire and Berkshire. We redirected some of our in-house trades team from planned works to repairs requests and are using sub-contractors more to help meet high levels of demand.

Letting homes and collecting rent

During the year we reduced the average time it takes to relet a property to 20 days, against a target of 25 days. This means customers off waiting lists and into their homes sooner.



Lettings

We introduced [Sovereign Home Transfer](#), a new tool to help existing customers move to another Sovereign home (this is separate to doing a mutual exchange).

We also co-created a [RightSizing offer](#) with customers. As part of a pilot now being rolled out more widely, we supported eight customers to move to homes that better meet their needs: freeing up large family homes in the process.

Our new Housing Impact Team has improved support for existing customers to keep their tenancies, helping 263 customers over the year.

We also gave tenancy training to nearly 300 customers to help them move on into a tenancy that would last. And we referred 17 potential customers to our Getting Tenancy Ready programme with our partner, [Yellow Brick Road](#). Five of these have since been offered a tenancy.

Lettings

- Let 2,961 homes, including 568 new ones – up 111 from the year before
- 691 mutual exchanges – clearing the backlog from lockdowns but there have been new delays from increased demand in 2022
- 13 Housing First homes for long-term homeless
- New partnerships with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council (BCP) and Southampton council to provide support for rough sleepers

Collecting rent

During the year we started using automated texts when someone goes into arrears. 67% of these customers now pay their rent within a week of hearing from us.

We also had some great successes accessing local authority funds to repay arrears or gain extra funds for customers.

While we've done more evictions than the previous year (when these were banned during Covid), these are still very rare with only 21 over the full year. As part of our eviction procedures, we won't seek to end a tenancy for anyone who is actively working with us.

Collecting rent

- Overall arrears of 2.6% (target 4.5%)
- 17,819 customer Universal Credit claims at year-end
- Satisfaction with value for money of service charge fell to 58% compared with 70% at the previous year-end

Keeping you safe

During the year, unacceptable failures and historic data errors meant that we weren't fully compliant on building safety when it came to checks in some communal areas in our blocks.

As soon as we learnt we were likely to be in breach, we informed the Regulator of Social Housing and put in place major recovery programmes, all completed in early 2022. We have also set up a new Building Safety Compliance Framework and measures to make sure this can never happen again.

Despite these issues, we continued to make good progress on the recommendations made at the Grenfell Phase 1 inquiry. We have surveyed external walls on all blocks over five storeys and brought in new Building Safety Managers to inspect and oversee all our 'taller buildings' (18 metres or over).

We were also successful in getting government Building Safety Scheme funding so that customers at Quay Point in Bristol won't have to pay to replace the cladding there.

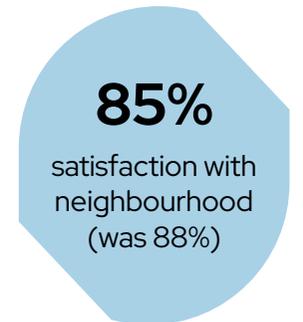
To help manage water safety and prevent legionella, we installed smart sensors at over 300 blocks, key worker sites and offices that we need to check regularly.



We spent £8m on fire safety improvements to high-risk properties

When it comes to neighbourhoods, anti-social behaviour (ASB) remains a high priority. Our recent focus has been on better assessing situations at the start, so that we can get things like mediation in place as early as possible.

A new Places Impact Team is improving our focus on estate neighbourhoods and this seems to be improving the experience for customers. In Berkshire, we've also brought grounds maintenance in-house to ensure a quality service.





Building for the future

We provide high quality homes at below market rates, so that our customers and communities can thrive.

This creates more rented homes for those who need them and new home ownership homes for those who would like that choice.

We also build a small number of properties for sale. Any money we make from these is ploughed back into other homes and services.

- Built 1,182 new homes – 430 for affordable rent and 193 for social rent (government grants are no longer available to build homes for social rent)
- Helped 436 households get a foot on the housing ladder through new shared ownership homes, including in Bristol, Winchester and Yate in South Gloucestershire
- Built 20 homes through joint ventures with developer partners and three homes for sale to new owner-occupiers.

This year our customer-led Scrutiny Group looked at several of the customer journeys for our leaseholders and shared owners. These help us understand how we can improve services and put customers at the heart of what we do.

Our [Homes and Place Standard](#) sets out our commitment to build and maintain good quality homes and better places to live. This includes all our homes being carbon neutral by 2050.

We use it with developers to design the new, more environmentally-friendly homes and places we want to build. During the year this included new homes through a joint venture with the developers Countryside, at Lotmead Farm near Swindon.

We'll also apply the Homes and Place Standard to the 40,000 existing homes we rent. It will help us decide what we need to do where to create homes that work for the long term. We will be looking at all the options, from refurbishing and retrofitting homes to full regeneration and improving public spaces and green areas.

In 2022/23 we're starting to pilot the 'retrofitting' of new greener technologies in a number of our existing homes. This work will let us understand how best to do this at a larger scale over the coming decades.

Supporting and involving customers and communities

We want to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of our residents and communities. And we do this by working with them and our partners.

We focus on a number of themes: community action, employment and training, money and digital, and resident engagement.

Examples of this over the year include kickstarting young people's careers, transforming outdoor spaces and funding community projects. We helped get people online, reduced isolation for older people, provided crisis support and carried out resident-led scrutines.

In total we invested £3.5m into communities and secured another £1.7m for projects through external funding.

Read more about our projects and grant funds on the ['My community' webpages](#) and in our ['Community grants: our impact'](#) report.

If you need support or advice, please ring us on 0300 5000 926 or visit the [advice and guides hub](#) on our website. We can help you access the help you need.

" The assistance we've received (through the Money and Digital programme) has made such a difference. We feel supported, valued and no longer invisible. I can't thank Sovereign enough."

Community action highlights

- Supported 638 community organisations and charities
- Worked with nearly 10,000 people
- Improved 4,513 square metres of green space and got involved in 44 environmental projects, including with [Backyard Nature](#)
- Achieved 1,858 'Live Well' outcomes: supporting over 55s to connect digitally or reduce isolation
- Secured a £225,500 grant over two years from the #iwill Fund for young people to have a greater say in their communities

Money and digital highlights

- Referred 214 customers to our independent money expert and debt advice partners – helping them save nearly £190,000
- Supported 565 people with digital training
- Supported 468 people with digital equipment
- Supported 1,280 households in fuel poverty with vouchers and other items

Employment and training highlights

- Supported over 1,267 people with employment-related advice and guidance
- Helped customers get 416 positive job outcomes
- Helped 1,105 people access training to improve their work skills or become more employable
- Delivered business start-up support and training to 69 residents to help them start, grow or maintain a business
- Set up a £100,000 grant to improve access to employment and training



We also delivered over £53.8m of social value for customers and communities through our own work, our partners and suppliers. Find out more about this and other related work in our [environmental, social and governance \(ESG\) report](#).

Getting involved

Residents have a key role in the way we're run, the services we provide and how we keep a local focus within our neighbourhoods. They're part of the decision-making process and their views are turned into practical actions.

Every level of engagement is important: from those involved strategically as part of our Resident and Board Partnership (RBP), at a more operational level through the Scrutiny Coordination Group (SCG), through our Youth Panel - to ensure the voice of our younger and future customers is being heard, or more widely through the feedback we receive every day.

Members of the RBP and SCG volunteered over 800 hours of their time to help us deliver a lasting impact. But we want to continue to grow and develop our thinking. So, we are reviewing our model of engagement to make sure we can connect with more customers and in more depth.

Customer-led work during the year looked at journeys on shared ownership staircasing and resales, lease extensions for leaseholders and services for key workers and those on market rents.

Customers also led and completed scrutinies into the process for groups who want to apply for a community grant and into how our customers use social media.

Find out all about [resident engagement](#) on our website, including how to get involved.

Getting involved highlights

Over the last year we have made great strides in delivering on what the Social Housing Regulator and Housing Ombudsman Service expect from social landlords. Working with customers we have:

- introduced our virtual assistant pilot for gas services - giving better access at times to suit our customers. We had nearly 3,000 interactions in the first six weeks, with 25% of these outside working hours
- launched real-time customer feedback in Devon, so customers can give us instant feedback on work in their homes. We sent over 800 text surveys in one month
- carried out customer workshops into how we can '[decarbonise our homes](#)' to make them greener, more safe, secure and cost effective. This ongoing conversation will also help shape how we meet the outcomes in our Homes and Place standard
- discussed the supposed stigma of living in social housing with our scrutiny group: This is also a topic being looked at by the government in the Social Housing White Paper and by the National Housing Federation with its Together with Tenants charter. The group looked at how Sovereign's approach to residents could help combat stigma and agreed to include questions on this in all scrutiny projects.

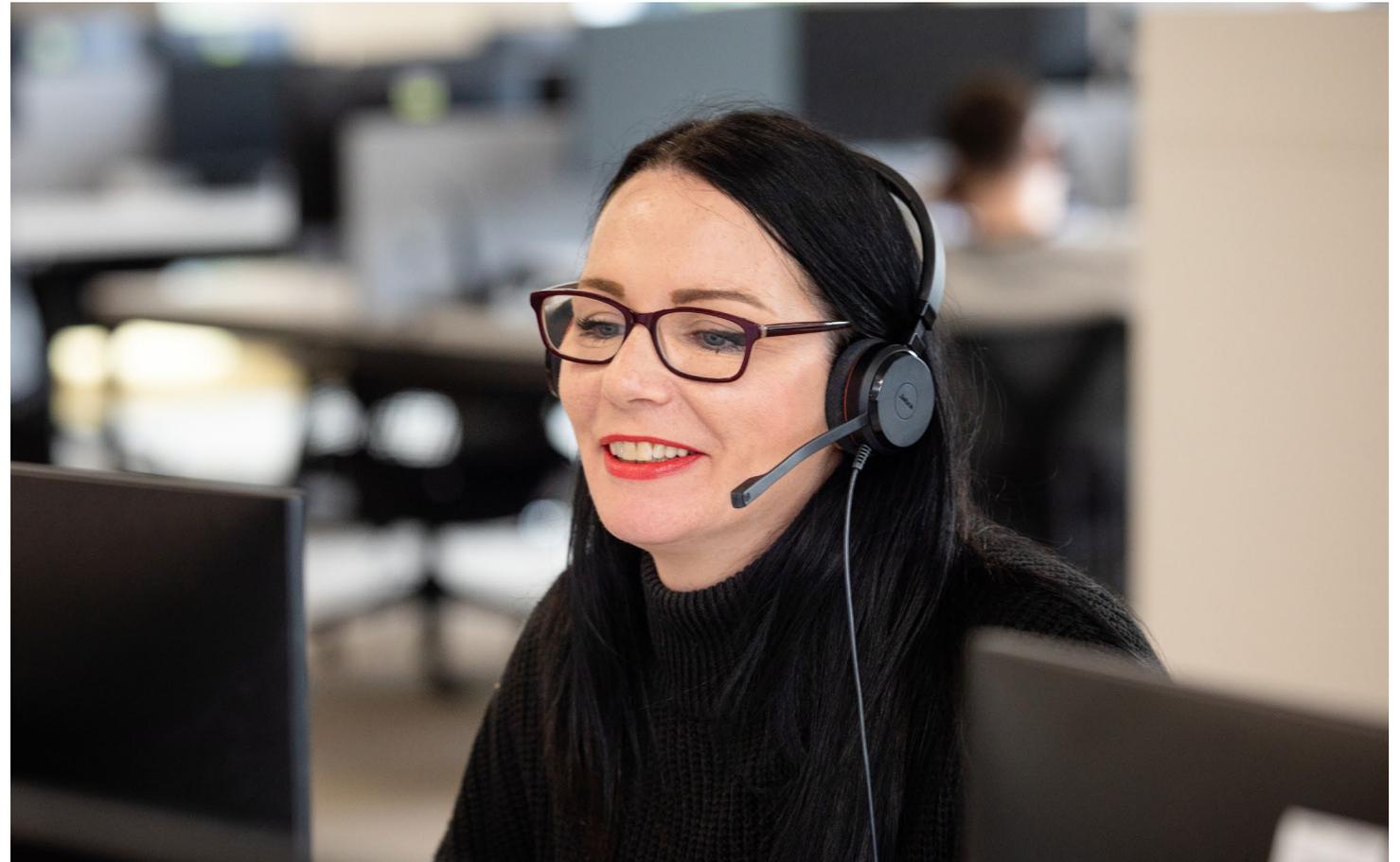
Getting in touch

Don't forget there are lots of ways you can contact us. These include by email, direct messaging us on Facebook @askSovereign or by phone.

We now offer video calls as well to do an early visual assessment of any damp and mould problems. Video calls also work well to try and resolve minor gas boiler issues without the need for customers to wait for an engineer's visit.

We're also making increasing use of email and SMS messaging to contact customers quickly and easily.

[My.Sovereign.org.uk](https://www.mysovereign.org.uk) is a great channel to use too. This is the online home for everything to do with your tenancy. Once you've registered, you can make payments or report a repair, find out what responsibilities you have and what we're responsible for as your landlord.



In December 2021 we moved My.Sovereign to a new platform which will let us make more improvements. New features already include the option to upload photos of damp and mould - to help us assess problems more quickly. We also added new [advice and guides](#) hubs plus a new search function.

Did you know that our websites also offer accessibility and translation software? Click the 'accessibility tools' link at the top of each page and a toolbar will appear. This lets you have the content spoken to you; change the font size, font and background colours; or translate text into another language.

Please get in touch if you need any other information in a different language or format.

Customer contact highlights

- Sent 3,115 text messages for winter support
- Average call wait time down to 1 minute 12 seconds at year end
- Reduced response times for emails and contacts via social media
- 64% first time resolution for new Property Repairs Resolution Team
- Better communication about repairs appointments, including SMS reminders four days in advance

Listening to our customers

We've adopted the National Housing Federation's 'Together with Tenants' charter, which sets out what you can and should expect from your landlord.

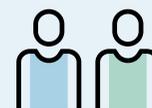
Our own Customer Impact Strategy embeds the six big principles from that charter. These include being more accountable, what happens when things go wrong, and giving residents a voice so they can influence what we do.

We also want to make our strategy real by assessing everything we do against nine outcomes which every customer has a right to – outcomes we co-created with customers.

Part of how we assess our success on doing this is by gathering feedback in a variety of ways.

- Monthly telephone surveys let us check how satisfied customers are with how we're performing on three key areas: responsive repairs, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and complaints. While the year-end results were lower than we would like, these are areas we continue to focus on and we're seeing improvements in all three in 2022/23.
- Our quarterly Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) surveys ask customers to rate us based on a range of factors. Over 1,500 customers took part and their feedback lets us focus on continuous improvements.
- Our last 'STAR' survey showed that overall satisfaction for the year was 72%. This reflected a dip across the whole UK as people remained uncertain and anxious about fuel and living costs as well as the war in Ukraine and the ongoing impact of Covid.
- From 2022/23 we will be running these STAR surveys every month and should collect feedback from more than 2,500 customers during the year.

Nine customer outcomes



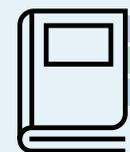
I'm treated fairly and with respect



Dealing with you is effortless and easy



You listen to me and respond in a personalised way



I'm well informed and you do what you say you'll do



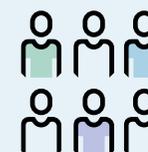
You anticipate my changing needs and aspirations



I live in a good quality, affordable home



I'm involved in shaping where I live



I feel part of my community



I'm proud of where I live, I feel safe and secure



Customer satisfaction results

- Repairs satisfaction 88% (target 95%)
- Complaints satisfaction 41% (target 70%)
- Antisocial behaviour satisfaction 58% (target 75%)

If and when things go wrong, our [complaints approach and policy](#) make sure we take issues seriously. During the year we received 3,921 complaints with just over 23% being about how we'd communicated with customers.

While we resolve the vast majority of complaints via our internal process, 34 were referred to the Housing Ombudsman, 18 of which were closed during the year. We received 22 decisions on these cases: 11 were decided as no maladministration, 9 were found to show service failures and 2 were outside of the ombudsman's jurisdiction.

The nine service failures covered a range of areas, including complaint handling and repairs.

We are transforming how we handle complaints and are in the first phase of moving to a centralised way of managing cases. This will make sure we deliver a consistent level of service and resolve complaints more quickly.

When it comes to repairs, we continue to work with our suppliers to minimise supply chain challenges and have improved our business reporting to make sure we focus resource where support is most needed.

In spring 2022 we also set up a cross-service team to resolve longer-standing complaints following reduced service in some areas from the pandemic and related issues. This managed to reduce the backlog by almost half in just three weeks.



Want to know more?

These documents give you more detailed information on our services, financial statements and other key aspects of what we do.

[Annual Report 2022](#)

[ESG Report 2022](#)

[Value for Money report](#)

[Corporate Plan](#)

[Homes & Place Standard](#)

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