

Community grants: our impact

Year-end report 2021/22

Introduction

During the year, we invested more than ever into working alongside our community and residents, with over £3.5m from Sovereign and £1.7m secured from external partners.

There are hundreds of examples of ways that we, our residents and partners have helped our communities to thrive, including:

- kickstarting young people's careers
- transforming outdoor spaces
- funding community projects
- getting people online
- reducing isolation for older people
- and providing crisis support, which included supplying white goods and food vouchers

Let's take a closer look at the work, the stories and the statistics that really stood out...



What we do and why we do it

Community Action

- Building strength and resilience in our communities is fundamental to making our homes great places to live. We adopt an asset-based community development approach. That means working alongside the community to empower them to achieve their goals. Our role is to help identify and mobilise existing, but often unrecognised, assets to drive the community's development.

Money and Digital

- Money Matters and Digital Inclusion are essential for people's wellbeing and maximising their life opportunities. We're committed to providing all our customers with the digital skills and access to digital equipment to make the most of the online world. We also work with specialist partners to tackle financial insecurity, focusing on money and debt advice, fuel poverty and budgeting.

Employment and Training

- Working with a range of partners, we create, fund and deliver projects to help residents access employment, skills and training opportunities. From looking for work to wanting a better job, a change of career or a business start-up, we've helped 1,000s achieve a brighter future.



Summary of our impact in 2021/22

Across our whole thriving communities programme, we...

- invested **£3.5m into communities**, plus secured **£1.7m in external funding**
- engaged with **over 10,000 people in our communities**
- supported more than **635 community organisations and charities**
- **improved 4,513 square metres of green space** – that's the size of three and a half Olympic swimming pools
- delivered over **£53.8m social value**

What some of our residents and partners said...

"My Employment and Training Officer helped me understand how I could market the skills I already had and look at modern ways of looking for a job, including using social media. A few weeks later, I found work, which boosted my confidence."

Sovereign resident

"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."

Sovereign residents

"Thank you to Sovereign for their generous donation.

"With their support we are able to continue providing ambitious, dynamic training opportunities for people with learning disabilities and autism in our Life Changing Cafes."

Yellow Submarine, Oxfordshire

Part 1

Community
action
highlights

Community action

Everything we do is designed to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of our residents individually, and to help develop thriving and resilient communities.

We focus on identifying, connecting and mobilising the existing people, groups, places and organisations in communities to realise their potential and create sustainable community-driven development.

Where we can, we try to support local change on the things that matter to people in that area – looking to improve health, wealth and wellbeing.

Community Development Officers

Our Community Development Officers play a vital role, working alongside grass roots organisations in their geographical area.

As well as providing grants and project funding, they're there to give advice and information – facilitating community action, sharing involvement and training opportunities, suggesting new partnerships and signposting other sources of funding.

They also engage with residents who are part of a group or who want to set up a group or project in their area.

- In 2021/22, they supported 547 community organisations with training and development opportunities.

We also have several specific community grants programmes:

Crowdfunder

This partnership enables Sovereign communities to develop their own projects to match fund from the crowd and create great places and spaces. This approach empowers people to actively show their passion for projects that really mean something to them.

- So far, we've pledged £206,101 – which supported 76 projects in our communities

The Good Exchange

The Good Exchange brings together a community of funders, fund raisers, donors and the public in support of community and charitable projects. The unique web platform automatically matches projects to multiple sources of funding via a single application.

- In 2021/22, we supported 30 projects and pledged £90,171

Your Community Your Choice

This resident-led funding project uses a 'participatory budgeting' model, empowering customers and communities to submit and then vote for ideas to improve outdoor spaces.

- In 2021/22, we invested £200,000 with residents voting on 19 projects



Community action highlights

- supported **638 community organisations and charities**
- worked with nearly **10,000 people**, including **982 aged 16 -25** and **1,858 over 55s**
- secured **£1.7m funding** for community projects
- improved **4,513 square metres of green space** and involved in **44 environmental projects**
- achieved **1,858 'Live Well' outcomes**, supporting over 55s to connect digitally or reduce isolation
- **funding from #iwill Fund** for young people to access **social action** opportunities



Case study: joining the 'crowd' to reduce food waste

We pledged £1,750 to Longfield Community Fridge's "Feed Bellies, Not Bins" Crowdfunder campaign.

The funding, from our Crowdfunder community grants fund, supported the Fridge's aim to redistribute food that would otherwise be thrown away, to Trowbridge residents. It's fed over 100 bellies since launching and is open each week on a first-come, first-served basis at Longfield Community Centre.

The team behind the Fridge will also be working with Bath University's research team to survey users to find out what other issues they might like to see addressed in the community.

Zoe Meaden, Community Manager for Trowbridge Future, said: "With the support of Sovereign, we have launched our third Community Fridge - this time on the Longfield Estate. This means we can widen the vital provision of food we offer to the people of Trowbridge."

Henry Palmer, Community Development Officer for Sovereign, said: "While it's sad that community fridges are currently a necessity in this country, being able to reduce food waste and create a community development launchpad that's based on the assets the community already has, is a real pleasure."

Access our grants programmes

Community grants

<https://www.sovereign.org.uk/advice-and-guides/my-community/grants-for-residents>

Crowdfunder

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/funds/sovereign-communities>

Employment and Training grants

<https://www.sovereign.org.uk/advice-and-guides/support/jobs-and-training>

The Good Exchange <https://app.thegoodexchange.com/funders/10874/sovereign-housing-association>

Money and digital grants

<https://www.sovereign.org.uk/advice-and-guides/support/getting-online/money-and-digital-grants>

Sovereign #iwill Fund (New for 2022/23)

<https://www.sovereign.org.uk/sovereign-iwill-fund>

Your Community Your Choice

<https://www.sovereign.org.uk/your-community-your-choice>

Part 2

Money and
digital service
highlights

Money and digital

Our **money matters** offer is all about helping our customers who are struggling most financially. Built by working with expert partners, it's designed to offer both short-term emergency help and longer-term positive change. Sometimes we need to help the 'now' to enable a 'then'.

Our offer includes:

- White Goods Grant – providing a brand new white good (such as a cooker or fridge) including delivery and fitting.
- Emergency Fuel Vouchers – providing a voucher for gas or electric.
- Helping Hand Fund – providing an Amazon, Tesco or Asda voucher for our customers who've had a change of circumstance.
- Pocket Power – a telephone triage service helping customers save on household bills by getting a better deal or accessing discounts.
- Money and Debt advice – providing impartial money and debt support.
- Budgeting training – helping customers with planning ahead and making long-term money decisions.

Our **digital offer** is all about helping our residents to get online for the first time or improve their digital skills.

It aims to address the three main barriers to making the most of the online world: having the right equipment, having access to Wi-Fi or data, and having the confidence and skills.

Our offer includes:

- We are Digital – bespoke one to one training for residents with little to no experience of online. It helps with the basics of getting started but also looks to develop areas that are of interest to the learner.
- Learn my Way – available to all our residents, this offers a whole suite of online training modules to learn at your own pace (such as staying safe online, using social media or improving your Microsoft Word or Excel skills).
- Digital grants – offering up to £500 worth of equipment to get online, things like laptops or tablets but it also includes being able to offer a MiFi device with data (this is a small, portable router which connects via Bluetooth rather than needing WiFi).



Money and digital highlights

- saved customers nearly **£190,000**
- supported **565** people with digital training
- provided **468** people with digital equipment
- supported **1,280** households in fuel poverty with vouchers and other items



Case study: Amanda's story

Amanda, a single mother from New Milton, was working in hospitality but became unemployed due to the Covid19 lockdowns.

Amanda said: "Living on Universal Credit just covered the bills and luxuries became a distant memory."

To make ends meet, Amanda had to seek help from food parcels and free share larders which, although helpful, made her feel a bit ashamed.

Amanda talked to her Income Officer about how she was struggling financially and was referred into the Helping Hand Fund through the Money and Digital team. Through this she received a £50 Asda voucher to help her get some groceries.

"These [foodbanks] have kept us fed but the Asda voucher felt like a luxury. Standing in queues for food, to be given food (not what you would choose) made me feel sometimes depressed. I kept my chin up by thinking this is what my grandparents must have done in the war with ration books. It would make me feel lower, like I am begging.

"Just being able to browse a supermarket and pick food we like felt good. This experience I realised had become so abnormal to us. I never thought two years ago I would be in this position. The voucher was easy to use at the till and we managed to have a little bit left to return for some bits on a later date."

"I'd like to say thank you so much."

Part 3

Employment
and training
service
highlights

Employment and training

Personalised support

Our Employment and Training team offer a personalised service of guidance, support and practical help to any Sovereign resident looking to access training or work.

This can include grants to help access training and work opportunities, support with their CV, with finding the right job, improving their interview skills, help to complete successful application forms, training and qualification opportunities, or digital skills support.

Business and Enterprise Support

Training and support for residents interested in self employment, launching, maintaining or growing their business. We work with them at any point in their journey: from concept and set-up to development and growth. Those who access support to develop their business idea and create a business plan can also apply for start-up funding.

Last year, we ran four **key employment programmes**:

1. Kickstart: working with the government, Clarion Housing and 57 other partners to offer paid work placements to under 25s on Universal Credit. Placements were designed to give each person new skills and experience. Due to its success, we invested another £250k to extend many placements an extra six months.
2. Skills 4 Work: 121 employment support and coaching open to anyone (not just Sovereign residents) living on the Isle of Wight, aged 16 and over and not in any paid work.

3. Strive Live: working with social enterprise Enterprise CUBE to offer residents free access to its Strive Live business programme, 'the start-up hub on your sofa'. The seven-week programme on Zoom (plus guidance from our Business Enterprise Officer) gives advice on everything from finding the money to start up and register a business, to pricing services and marketing to customers.
4. Yellow Brick Road Projects: some of those who apply for homes can't be considered because of concern they might not be able to sustain a tenancy. We worked with Yellow Brick Road Projects to offer the Pathway Project, helping them develop the skills they need to get and keep a tenancy, with a key focus on employment.

Grants

- **Training and qualification** – to help residents find a job or better job. Up to £500.
- **Work** – to remove financial barriers for starting a new job, work placement, or if a resident's struggling to stay in work due to a short-term financial barrier. Up to £250.
- **Business start up** – to help launch, grow or develop a business. Up to £1,000.
- **Childcare** – to support with direct childcare costs (to registered childcare providers) to start work, a work placement or complete a training course. Up to £750.



Employment and training highlights

- supported over **1,267** individuals to **access employment related advice and guidance**
- **416 job outcomes** for customers
- supported access to **1,105 training outcomes** for employability and vocational skills
- delivered bespoke **business start-up support and training to 69 residents** to help them start, grow or maintain a business
- Set up **£100,000** grant to **improve access** to employment and training



Case study: Pardeep's story

Resident Pardeep, whose aim was to open an Indian food catering business providing authentic Punjabi cuisine for venues and events around Bristol, tells us how the Strive Live business start up programme has impacted her:

"Having never run a business before, I needed to understand how to officially start one, so I enrolled on Strive Live, which gave me the confidence and understanding to pursue my idea.

"Working with Josh [Sovereign's Business Enterprise Officer], we planned my next steps, which included arranging local authority permissions.

"We also worked on a business plan, cashflow forecast and what I needed to buy. The main investment I needed to make was commercial equipment so I could make food at scale, so I applied for a business grant from Sovereign.

"I also applied for Sovereign's training grant, so I could complete an online business accounting and bookkeeping course. I was then ready to begin trading.

"My first booking at a local pub was hugely popular and received great feedback from locals.

"I now run my business flexibly alongside part-time work and my family. I have developed knowledge and skills within business which I never had before."



The future

Our ambitious plans for communities include:

- working with over 500 charities and community groups each year
- supporting 700 residents into employment each year
- working in partnership to bring external funding into our communities, to maximise our impact.

Keep up to date with what we're up to by visiting www.sovereign.org.uk/thriving-communities

Get in touch

If you'd like more details on our thriving communities approach, please get in touch. Ring us on 0300 5000 926 or email us:

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