CASE STUDY: TENANT VOICE

SOVEREIGN HOUSING

Ideas into Action
On the 1st of December 2020, Sovereign Housing launched an £80,000 Participatory Budget campaign through the Vocaleyes platform to improve their communities in Bristol and Abingdon.

Sovereign is a leading English housing association, striving to provide quality, affordable homes in happy, successful places. Sovereign has deep roots in the south of England, with almost 60,000 homes focused in a core area covering Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Devon, Wiltshire, the West of England and the Isle of Wight. They are driven by their social purpose, with residents at the heart of everything they do.

Sovereign builds homes and provides services, but their work doesn’t stop at the front door – they invest for the long-term, creating great places to live, working with residents and partners to support them in realising their potential.

We listen and act on our resident feedback, making sure our residents’ voice is embedded in our governance, scrutiny and community work.
Community democracy

As part of the community engagement strategy, residents were encouraged to suggest ideas in the ‘Your Community Your Choice’ project and also rate and debate each other’s ideas using a digital democracy platform.

Prior to launch, the project was published in the local media, which provided a good awareness-generating campaign.

Over the course of the one year project, 1,187 people (993 in Bristol and 194 in Abingdon) actively participated in feeding back their thoughts on how to improve their areas. This included 38 ideas (15 in Bristol and 23 in Abingdon) that were originated by residents which received 2,385 ratings (1,756 in Bristol and 529 in Abingdon).

Outcomes

After the extensive consultation from the projects in Bristol and Abingdon, Sovereign Housing looked at the most popular choices and used this to direct their support.

In Bristol six projects were supported, ranging from food projects to improving community spaces. In Abingdon four projects were supported with the main theme being 'outdoor wellbeing'.
Bristol's six projects:

'Fat Dad's Community Kitchen' was awarded £10,000. There was strong community engagement around this project, with 352 people voting for it to happen. The funding awarded will be used to kit out their bus, which once on the road will visit Sovereign communities around Bristol.

'Oat Float' was awarded £5,000 after 227 people voted on the project, showing that it is something the community would love to see happen. The funding will be used to complete the refurbishment of the electric milk float, and to run free sustainability workshops for Sovereign residents.

'Share Bristol - Library of Things' was awarded £5,000. The communities' response, with 182 votes in just five days really showed the excitement the project generated. With 200 Sovereign homes within a 1-mile radius of the shop, it is a service that is likely to really benefit Sovereign residents. Share Bristol are going to use part of the funding to offer 50 residents’ free yearly memberships to the library with vouchers being allocated on a first-come-first-serve-basis.

'Square Food's Virtual Cooking Club' was awarded £5,000 to expand their virtual cooking club into Sovereign communities. The funding will be used to deliver 20 extra food boxes per week over one academic year to Sovereign residents. Food boxes will be allocated on a first-come-first-serve basis.

'Halston Drive Community Garden' was awarded £5,000 which will be used to start improving the unused space on Halston Drive in St Pauls. With 156 Sovereign homes within a 10-minute walk of the space, it will be a great improvement for many Sovereign residents. Wild in St Pauls are working collaboratively with the Bristol Parks team who were also registered on the platform.

The campaign to improve 'Ashley Court Recreational Area', which was led by Sovereign residents also got a lot of support locally. Sovereign Housing will work alongside residents at Ashley Court to transform the outdoor spaces into attractive areas that will improve the natural environment and bring the community together.
Abingdon’s four projects:

£10,000 was allocated to **Improving the Larkmead garden/allotment** which had 56 votes. This proposal will enable many young people in Abingdon to take part in growing, and using their produce in their cooking. Many Sovereign residents will benefit from this scheme and are pleased to be supporting Larkmead school on a project that will help students in such a variety of ways.

'Fountain Court Communal Garden' secured £10,000 of funding towards their plans. The proposal secured the support of 29 votes and will have a great impact on this community. Covid-19 has highlighted how important garden spaces are to those who are isolated, and we hope revamping this space for older people will bring benefits to those that live here.

'Thameside Primary School Outdoor Wellbeing' project was very popular with 101 votes, and is being supported with £10,000 of funding. This school serves many of the younger residents, and this garden will provide the outdoor space that will promote the positive wellbeing of all attending. The space will help the physical, emotional and mental health of the school community.

A 'Green Roof Cycle Shed' attracted 26 votes and Sovereign have found a place where they can use it. They will provide £10,000 towards a large cycle shed for residents in north Abingdon. There was great feedback from locals about how this would help them with active travel around the area, and it will solve issues of storage and safety.
Impact

- 1,187 total participants got involved.
- 38 new ideas were generated with 2,385 ratings.
- 543 pledges in Bristol.
- 99 pledges in Abingdon.

2,718 Interactions

10 New projects

Next steps:

Sovereign Housing has taken account of the feedback and has expanded the consultation for next year. Not only will the project move into Plymouth and the Isle of Wight with £50,000 funding pots in each area, Bristol and Abingdon will also continue and will each receive a fresh pot of £35,000 of funding for next year.

"After learning from the first round of funding, we are now planning to start much earlier in the funding cycle for next year’s projects meaning that it will be much easier to support residents in developing ideas before they are voted upon; leading to much stronger engagement and an even better consultation".

Sovereign Housing

Vocaleyes can help your Community find the best way to put ideas into action. Take a look: www.vocaleyes.org