

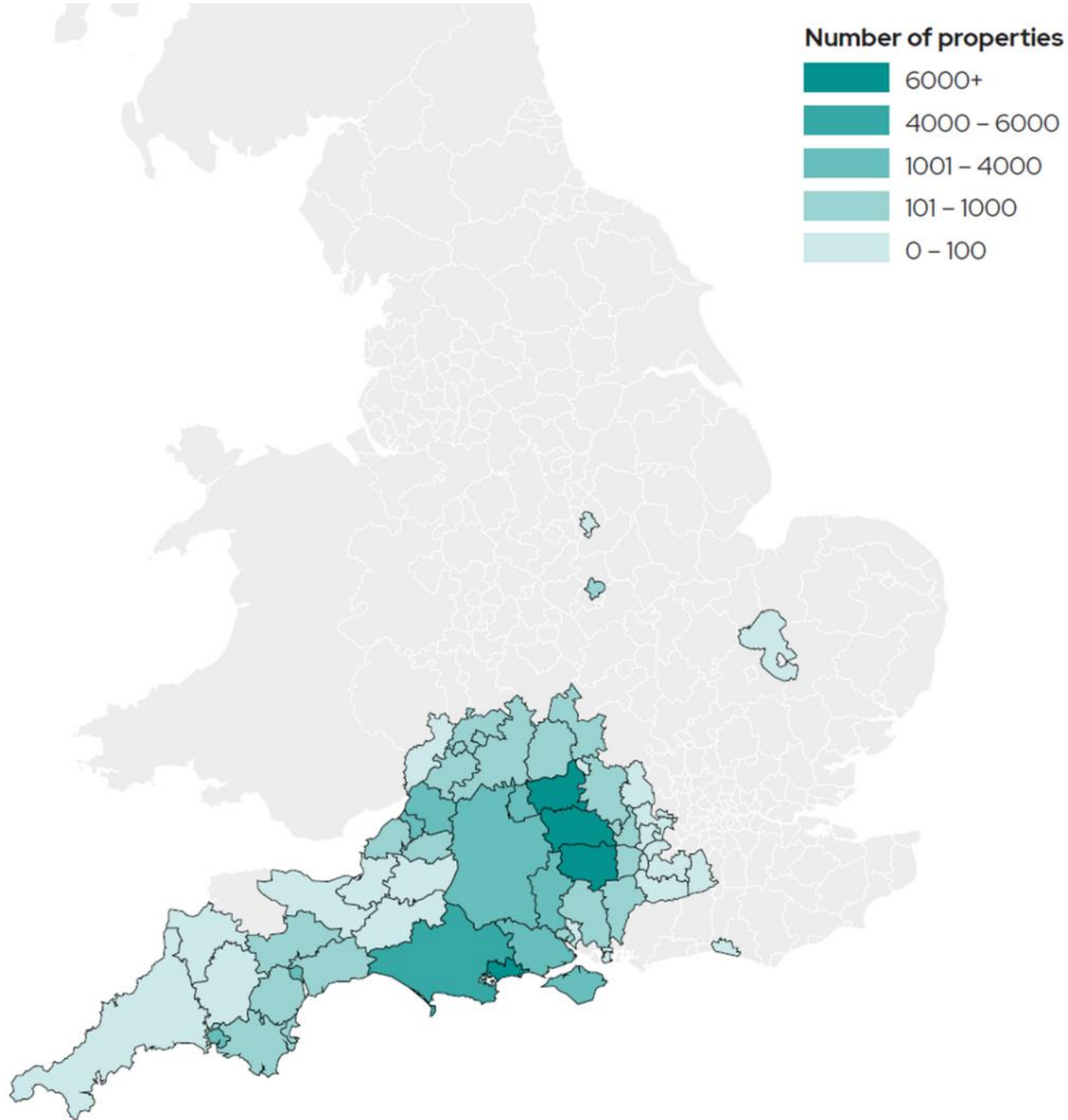


Universal Credit

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Version 1



Who we are

- 60,000 homes across the south
- Provide social rented, market rented, shared ownership and outright sales
- Approx 1,700 keyworker homes
- Specialist supported housing team covering approx. 1,300 homes
- We're aiming to build 1,900 new homes a year



A major business with sector leading ratings

£216.5m Investment in new homes

£102m Investment in our existing homes

£417m Turnover

60,538 Homes managed

£13bn Market value

Sovereign has some of the strongest ratings in the sector:

- Moody's **A2**
- Standard and Poor's **A+**
- Reconfirmation of Regulator of Social Housing **G1 / V1**

SOVEREIGN



Universal Credit



Universal Credit – the numbers as at end of September 2021

16,717 live UC
claims

18% on direct
payment

UC Arrears
5.8% target 7%

56% of UC cases in
arrears v 48% non
UC cases in arrears

Average UC arrears
balance £674 v non
UC arrears balance
£300

Challenges and risks





Organisational challenges around UC during the pandemic

- Responding to an overwhelming number of contacts from customers initially at the start of lockdown
- Managing the impact of increase in volume of UC cases – 550 new claims in first week of April 2020. Plus, managing UC verifications at the same time
- Upskilling as many staff as possible to be able to provide advice and support
- Explaining the UC journey and offering support throughout where needed
- Keeping up to date on what seemed like daily changes to the welfare system and making sure 100+ staff & residents were aware of the most up to date info
- Being very flexible, change in approach, less enforcement – impact on arrears



Customer challenges around UC in the pandemic

- Many new UC claimants had never claimed benefits in their working life
- No understanding of what to claim or how
- Fear factor of the UC reputation – myth busting the tabloid stories
- Five weeks wait and managing unexpectedly on a reduced or no income – no back up plan or resources
- Payment amount can change each month, residents find it difficult to budget
- Managing on UC once in payment – living on a reduced income, advance deductions or repaying private borrowing

What we have learnt





What's worked well

- Upskilling income officers – bespoke training was key
- UC triage process – heading off issues before claims are in payment
- Offering individualised support through UC claim journey
- Building a relationship with residents
- Recording data such as payment dates and using texts to remind residents what to do and when to pay
- Easy to access info for residents about the UC journey
- More joined up internal services, with money and debt advice and Employment and training teams
- Learning from feedback from teams to review and refine processes and information



Current and emerging risks

- **Furlough ending** Unemployment rates lower than the national average at 2.92% compared with 6.4%, approx. in our area of operation but seeing a small creep in usual UC claim numbers
- **The £20 per week uplift on UC** being phased out in September/October. Households may struggle on this reduced income. But good news about the household support fund
- **Re-introduction of the minimum floor limit** for self employed over 12 months until 31 July 2022.
- **Nat Fed research** – increased demand on localised support services such as food banks, and a further increase in numbers affected by fuel poverty as fuel bills likely to rise this winter. Potential for those most in need to be left behind



Sovereign's offering

- **Awareness campaigns** – use of social media
- **Tenancy Support** team – FCA regulated, offer independent, impartial money and debt advice through MAPS
- **Employment and Training** team – personalised support to access work and a range of grants to get into work
- **Business and enterprise support** for residents interested in self-employment, launching, maintaining or growing a business.
- **Hardship fund** – for those residents who experience a crisis due to a change of circumstances
- **Emergency Fuel** vouchers providing an emergency top up of fuel vouchers for gas or electric
- **Pocket Power** – a telephone triage service to help customers save money on a host of utility and household bills.
- **White Goods Grant** – providing customers in financial hardship with brand new white goods such as a fridge freezer, oven or a washing machine.
- **We are Digital & Learn My Way** – Digital training to help residents develop the skills and confidence to navigate and make the most of the online world, improving their digital skills
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing** – online platform that helps to support with low level mental health and wellbeing needs



The next 12-24 months and beyond

2021/22

- Restructured the income service in July- functional service
- Consolidating and refining approach to UC – trialling dedicated UC officers
- Using insight to understand resident profile of those who struggle on UC and how we need to flex our support and services
- Working more ‘upstream’ targeting those on HB with court orders ahead of moving to UC
- Consideration being given to an enhanced in house debt advice offer

2022/23

- Continue to work closely with the DWP to get ahead of the game for when managed migration starts April 2022
- Review IT technologies to support income teams to do more with same resources. Look at what can be automated so teams have the resources to support more complex cases
- Refine and build on data insight using Power BI to drive performance and our response to what residents need from us



**Thank you for
listening.**

**Now over to you
for questions.**