

EDITION 21: SPRING 2015 - Simple up to date, important news for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

WANT TO LEARN A NEW SKILL?



The residents' Communications Group meets quarterly to help our Communications team improve the websites, booklets leaflets, events or campaigns that go out to residents and homeowners. They give ideas about the things they want to hear about from Octavia and suggest ways of engaging with more residents.

The input we have gained from these meetings has been invaluable and we are still hungry for more feedback on ways we can improve our communications tools, processes and materials.

We are looking for more residents to get involved this year, and in return, we are offering each individual who joins the group – a chance to learn new skills by attending a communications training course and access to further online training as well as receiving an incentive for participating in quarterly meetings.

Look out for an email from neha.bhatt@octavia.org.uk in the coming months or contact Neha now on [020 8354 5665](tel:02083545665) if you want to be involved.

Save the Date - YourSpace!
Saturday 13 June, St Charles
College



YourSpace! 2015, our popular resident fun event will be held this year on Saturday 13 June 2015 from 11am-3pm at St Charles College, 74 St Charles Square, W10 6EY. Look out for more information about the day including free and fun activities on offer to all residents, new workshops and ways you can be involved on the day. If you have any ideas for the event or require any information please contact:

Anna de Souza, Resident Involvement Manager on [020 8354 5674](tel:02083545674) or email anna.desouza@octavia.org.uk

What do you think of
this newsletter?

Let us know at: E_update@octavia.org.uk

Contact us

Repairs:

T 0800 479 0011 (freephone)

Customer Services:

T 020 8354 5500 E info@octavia.org.uk

W www.octaviahousing.org.uk

Decent Homes Standard

We've been investing significantly in our stock since our last Asset Management Strategy was published in 2009. For example, we've carried out a number of boiler replacements cyclical repairs and decorations, kitchen and bathroom upgrades, energy efficiency works and aids and adaptation works to resident's homes.

We wanted to see the progress we had made on our decent homes targets by doing all of this work. Therefore, we employed an independent company to carry out stock condition surveys on 20% of our properties – the properties picked presented a good representative sample of our homes which meant that the results

produced would be 95% accurate when applied across all our stock.

We found that only 1.6% of our properties fail to meet the decent homes standard and in the majority of cases this was due to energy efficiency which we will be addressing in future investment works.

Access the best services from your online Octavia account today

Our customer portal is a very useful tool for residents allowing you to securely access your personal information, such as:

- ▶ Your rent account details.
- ▶ Checking the progress of any repairs you have reported.
- ▶ Direct contact details of your Neighbourhood and Income officer, Surveyor and Caretaker.
- ▶ Any personal details we hold of you.

It's easy - register for the customer portal via our site www.octaviahousing.org.uk by clicking on the 'My Account' link.

We have worked with many residents to be able to put our new website together and we want to keep on improving it so we would love to hear what you think about it. Email us at update@octavia.org.uk and let us know.

'Its a game changer'

Octavia is committed to making sure that our homes are energy efficient, the reason we do this is because poorly insulated homes are more expensive to heat and have a negative impact of the environment.

Our aim is that over the next 8 years all our homes will have a good Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C. This is a good energy performance rating and realistically the best we can achieve given the age of a lot of our homes.

This is a very tough target given half of our 4,400 homes are over 100 years old and were not built with energy efficiency in mind, they have solid walls and single glazed windows. Despite their age they also have historical character and there is great deal of resistance to changing original features. We need to convince the Planning Authorities that our proposals are needed and will not negatively impact the appearance of our homes.

Over the last 12 months we have put together a strong argument for why the improvement proposed will make a difference. On Tuesday 24 March Westminster Planning Committee approved our application to install external wall insulation and to fit double glazed aluminium windows to the rear of 20 properties on Ashmore Road, W9. This decision was described by one Councillor as a 'game changer in Westminster' we certainly hope that it will enable us to push on with our proposal for improving the energy efficiency of all our poorly insulated homes.

8 years sounds like a long time to wait but there are things you can do in the meantime, take a look at our top energy saving tips at www.octaviahousing.org.uk or visit the Energy Saving Trust site at www.uswitch.com/gas-electricity, for tips on how to reduce your energy bills. Octavia can also offer personalised energy efficiency advice, call us or email energy@octavia.org.uk and we can arrange for someone to come and visit you in your home.



Current



Proposed

Are you on Housing Benefit?

All tenants are expected to pay their rent in advance in accordance with their tenancy agreements. From April 2015, Octavia will also be expecting tenants in receipt of housing benefit to have one week's rent in advance on their rent account. We recognise that this will be difficult to achieve immediately and therefore we are asking for tenants on housing benefit to pay £3.70 per week until one week's rent has been built up. As well as keeping to your tenancy agreement this will also help to minimise the impact on your rent account when Universal Credit is introduced. For more information about these changes please contact your Income Officer.

Drop in surgeries

If you live in the Baker Street, Edgware Road, St John's Wood and Southwark area, you should have already received a letter from your Neighbourhood Officer, Carla Nhariwa about a drop in surgery on the Wilcove Estate on 16 Ashmill Street, London, NW1 6AR. The surgery is available on the 1st Tuesday of every month between 2-5pm, where you can speak face to face with your Neighbourhood Officer, Income Officer and the Senior Surveyor to discuss any housing issues, rent issues or maintenance issues.

(Please note this drop in surgery is only applicable for tenants who are managed by Carla Nhariwa.)



WELFARE REFORM CHANGES – THE LATEST NEWS AND HOW WE CAN SUPPORT YOU

Benefits are changing

Universal Credit is a new benefit replacing the following benefits:

- ▶ Jobseeker's Allowance
- ▶ Housing Benefit
- ▶ Working Tax Credit
- ▶ Child Tax Credit
- ▶ Employment and Support Allowance
- ▶ Income Support

In the future, all of these benefits will be merged into one new benefit and will be paid once a month as a lump sum directly to claimants. This means that for the first time many tenants will receive their Housing Benefit payments directly into their bank accounts and will be responsible for paying their rent directly to Octavia.

Universal Credit claims will also be managed online in future and so claimants will be expected to report changes of circumstance on the internet.

Universal Credit is being introduced across London boroughs very slowly this year with only single claimants making fresh claims for Jobseeker's Allowance being moved onto it. For Octavia tenants the rollout schedule for Universal Credit looks like this:

- ▶ Hammersmith and Fulham: February 2015
- ▶ Barnet: March 2015
- ▶ Brent: March 2015
- ▶ Hounslow: April 2015
- ▶ Wandsworth: April 2015
- ▶ Hillingdon: September 2015 – November 2015
- ▶ RBKC: September 2015 – November 2015

- ▶ Westminster: September 2015 – November 2015
- ▶ Southwark: December 2015 – April 2016
- ▶ Camden: December 2015 – April 2016

What you can do...

Tenants are advised to start budgeting on a monthly basis to become accustomed to this way of handling their finances ahead of the wider rollout of this benefit.

We are asking tenants to inform their income officer when they are moved onto this benefit so that we can provide additional support where necessary. Finally, we have two Citizens Advice Bureau surgeries every week on Thursdays and Fridays for Debt & Benefit issues and you are encouraged to access this service to get your finances in shape ahead of this new system.

I don't have access to the internet...

Millions of people who do not have internet access in their homes can now find information about Universal Credit (UC) and finding work by hitting the red button on their TV remote control. Sky and Virgin customers who have interactive TV can simply scroll through the menu to the relevant page to view a raft of information.



Successful crackdown on Tenancy Fraud



Having worked closely on a new initiative with our local authority partners, we have recently recovered 9 properties from fraudsters. These were tenants who were illegally sub-letting their property or not using it as their principal home. Sub-letting is not only a breach of tenancy, but it is also a criminal offence and can result in both fines and up to 2 years imprisonment. In a number of cases tenants owned properties elsewhere and in some instances, were living abroad.

Tenants who are sub-letting or not using their property as their principal home are cheating Octavia residents on the transfer list and families in temporary accommodation who are desperate and often waiting years for a social rented property.

We regularly carry out tenancy audits and are currently investigating a number of other cases. If you suspect that a neighbour is illegally subletting their property or just abandoned it, please contact us on [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500) and ask to speak to your Neighbourhood Officer or email us at fraud@octavia.co.uk. Alternatively, if you wish to report it anonymously, you can phone our 24 hour reporting hot line on [020 8354 5575](tel:02083545575). Please briefly state the reason why you suspect tenancy fraud.

Improve your local area and bid for a Shared Area Improvements!

Every year we put money aside to improve the shared areas at some of our homes. We use this money to carry out works that go beyond our normal responsibilities as your landlord. If you live in a rented property or a mixed tenure development you can bid on behalf of yourself and your neighbours for a grant of up to £25,000. Examples of improvements works can include, cycle storage, upgrading footpaths and walkways, improving rubbish and recycling area, landscaping shared gardens, or improving security.

You can request an improvement at any time during the year. We will consider whether your request is viable, and whether it meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Improvement to security or safety of residents
- Resolve or improve a nuisance or anti-social behaviour issue
- Improve storage or access to a building, block or estate
- Introduce or increase growing or planting capacity
- Make the environment more attractive

We will also consider whether there are any other options, and whether the improvement will provide value for money. A resident panel will be responsible for reviewing received applications. If they agree to the bid and grants are awarded, Octavia generally carry out works between April and September. This is a great opportunity for residents to work together to improve their shared space!

Repairs Focus Group



On 18 March, residents who were not satisfied with the repairs service were invited to attend a focus group in order to identify ways to improve the repairs experience. Key things raised at the focus group included poor diagnosis of works completed, problems with missed appointments and complaints of inconsistencies

between contractors and staff. Communication was identified as an area which needed improving as well as improving resident's confidence in the operative's skill and ensuring repairs were completed first time round.

Residents also suggested some improvements and recommendations which have been shared with the Asset Management Department and a second focus group will be arranged with residents who have indicated satisfaction with the repairs service. The information obtained from both groups will be presented to our Tenants Steering Group in July for comment. We then hope to engage our Resident Inspectors with investigating and testing the areas which most need to change.

DID YOU KNOW?



Need help with small jobs around the home?



We offer a free handyman service for residents aged 60 or over or who are receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments. We deliver this service in partnership with the Silver Saints professional handyman service. Silver Saints provide help with small jobs around the home that are usually the responsibility of the tenant so are not covered by our repairs service. The Silver Saints handymen are multi-skilled, experienced, friendly and reliable. Call [020 7099 9199](tel:02070999199) or email fixit@silversaints.co.uk to find out the type of jobs they can carry out in your home.

Enjoy a clean garden this summer



We work in partnership with the Octavia Foundation and Age UK Kensington & Chelsea to offer older or vulnerable residents practical help with garden maintenance

tasks. The Garden Guardians service is available free of charge to residents who are over the age of 55 or who are vulnerable because they have particular support needs and live in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea or immediate borders.

The Guardian Guardians service is provided by volunteers who can help residents with: clearing overgrown gardens, improving garden security, mowing lawns, weeding and pruning (but not tree works), tips on low-maintenance gardening and advice about tool adaptations.

Your Neighbourhood Officer or Support Worker can make a referral to the Garden Guardians service. For more information please visit our website www.octaviahousing.org.uk or call [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500).

The first 10 people who share their stories after using this service will receive a £20 shopping voucher. Please contact Neha Bhatt on [020 8354 5665](tel:02083545665) if you would like to share your story.

Residents work closely with Octavia in legal case

Thanks to some close working with residents at one of our estates, we were able to regain possession of a property following anti-social behaviour.

The property was occupied by a friend of a tenant, who had moved in after the lawful tenant had been sent to prison. Octavia started legal proceedings to remove the unauthorised occupant following reports of the anti-social behaviour (ASB) received from neighbours. The ASB was noise, frequent visitors to the property late at night and security concerns with the communal doors being frequently left open. At the same time, Octavia took legal steps to end the tenancy of the lawful tenant due to the long prison sentence they are serving.

Octavia were successful in regaining possession and a large part of this success was due to other residents at the scheme working together and regularly reporting incidents to the Neighbourhood Officer. Along with good joint working with the Neighbourhood Officer, police and our solicitors.

If you are affected by Anti-Social Behaviour, please contact your Neighbourhood Officer who can discuss and agree an action plan on the most appropriate methods available to investigate and resolve the ASB.

Improve your health and wellbeing



According to a review published by the British Journal of Cancer, nearly half of all cancers diagnosed in the UK each year are caused by avoidable life choices including smoking, drinking and eating the wrong things. The Spring is a perfect time to improve your health and wellbeing. You can do this by signing up to the new Health Trainer Service today.

Funded by Public Health, health trainers offer free one-to-one support, motivation and encouragement to all Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Hammersmith and Fulham residents aged over 18. The trainers offer a community based non-clinical service, aimed at helping people to improve their health and prevent ill-health by achieving a healthier lifestyle. The Health Trainer Service is also able to provide free NHS health checks to residents aged 40 to 74. To find out more, call [020 7099 3333](tel:02070993333) or visit: www.londonhealthtrainers.com and click on 'Book Now'.

Our performance

We closely monitor performance in all areas of our work in order to improve. A summary of how we are doing in key areas is below:

Performance indicator	January 2015	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	5.41%	5.1%	☹️
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	99.94%	100.15%	☹️
Standard voids – average re-let time in days (year to date)	19	20	😊
% of emergency repairs completed within target time	100%	99%	😊
% of urgent repairs completed within target time	100%	98%	😊
% of routine repairs completed within target time	99.04%	98%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (switchboard)	12	14	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	19	14	☹️
% responses to complaints within target time	100%	99%	😊
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from completed repairs survey)	94%	94%	😊

CALL FOR EMPLOYMENT ADVICE

**Ever wanted careers advice but not had the time to book an appointment?
Why not call our new telephone employment support service?**

We can help with... • Employment and careers advice • Finding or changing employment
• CV writing and updating • Training and courses



Octavia Foundation

Whether unemployed, in low paying job or curious about any employment related matter, we're ready to take your call on 020 8354-5686 each Friday between 10:00am and 12:00pm. Email babajide.ogunro@octaviafoundation.org.uk for further information

Please contact us if you need any part of this information in Braille, on audio tape or explained in a different language.

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