

EDITION 26: WINTER 2017 - Simple, up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

# UPDATE NEWSLETTER

## THINKING ABOUT YOUR NEXT CAREER MOVE?



- ▶ Looking for work?
- ▶ Want some help with updating or creating a CV?
- ▶ Need more experience or want to update your skills with training or volunteering?

We can help you to create a personal plan. We have a dedicated team who provide career advice, job application assistance, coaching and mentoring.

Visit our offices and ask for the employment and training team or call us on [020 8354 5686](tel:02083545686) / [5682](tel:02083545682). More information can also be found on our website at [www.octaviafoundation.org.uk](http://www.octaviafoundation.org.uk).

## Be a credit to your finances



Your Credit Union support people who want to consolidate their debts, take out short or long-term loans, to help save for a rainy day.

Usually only residents in Kensington and Chelsea are able to access this service but as an Octavia resident you are also able to benefit. Four good reasons to join:

1. The service offers savings accounts and affordable loans, often to individuals who have been turned down or are unable to access loans from other providers and banks.
2. Anyone can open a savings account if you can make a minimum deposit of £15. Your account will open with £10 and the extra £5 is taken to help pay for the running costs. There are no further costs to membership, ever.

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### What do you think of this newsletter?

Let us know at: [E\\_update@octavia.org.uk](mailto:E_update@octavia.org.uk)

### Contact us

Repairs:

T 0800 479 0011 (freephone)

Customer Services:

T 020 8354 5500 E [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk)

W [www.octaviahousing.org.uk](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk)

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3. Once you become a member you can get access to a savings account and the ability to apply for affordable loans.

4. You can make direct transfers on a regular basis from your bank account; or over the telephone with credit or debit card payments.

For more information, call Your Credit Union on [020 7605 6341](tel:02076056341) and arrange a meeting (free of charge) at their offices on 346 High Street Kensington or visit [www.yourcu.co.uk](http://www.yourcu.co.uk) for more information.

## A view from the CEO

Octavia has two real roles. The first is to manage our housing stock and support residents to enjoy their homes – and most of this newsletter is concerned with this activity. But our other task is to provide more homes. And you would have to be an ostrich not to realise how big that need is at the moment.

So, we were pleased to hear the recent proposals of Mayor, Sadiq Khan, to encourage developers to provide a bigger proportion of their developments for affordable housing, and to extend the system of grants a little bit.

In the inner London areas where Octavia operate homes acquired from developers are the main source of new housing for us and so we hope that with new policies in place that we will be able to go on adding additional properties every year for the next few years.

In the next three months we are completing developments in Paddington, Kensington and a further Extra Care scheme in Isleworth (a lovely property right on the river). In all we now have a pipeline of over 250 new properties – which means we are playing our part in addressing the current shortfall.

## Asbestos - some facts

Properties built before 1999 can sometimes contain Asbestos. It is a mineral fibre that was used often to insulate buildings but was banned in 1999 because breathing in asbestos dust can be harmful to health.

We have a very careful approach to managing Asbestos and have removed it from almost all the properties we own. Homes built after the ban in 1999 will not contain asbestos but some older buildings, particularly any built between the 1950s and the 1980s, may have some asbestos present but in most cases, this will be

very small amounts and will not release any harmful fibres under normal circumstances and so it is completely safe to live in a home like this.

Asbestos can sometimes be found in vinyl floor tiles, plastic toilet cisterns or in artex coatings on ceilings however so we warn not to drill or sand these items.

If you are concerned that there may be asbestos in your home or you want to find out more information, please contact your Resident Services Officer or visit our website.

## Answering your query at the first point of contact



Our Customer Contact Team have been working hard to expand the number of queries they can resolve without having to transfer you to another team. They can now help you with the following:

- ▶ Making a payment to your rent account.
- ▶ Confirming the balance on your rent account and making arrangements to clear any low level arrears.
- ▶ Parking enquiries, including issuing car parking permits on schemes where parking enforcement is in place.
- ▶ Arranging removal of abandoned cars on our schemes.

- ▶ Reports of anti-social behaviour.
- ▶ Mutual exchange and transfer information and advice, including transfer application and medical forms.
- ▶ Neighbourhood issues.
- ▶ Booking appointments surveyor appointments.

Only queries that are more complex or require involvement from a specialist team will be transferred.

You can contact the Customer Contact Team on our main number **020 8354 5500** or by email to [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk).

**FIRE SAFETY – please keep shared areas clear of personal belongings**



Our top priority is resident safety. It is really important for the safety of residents and others visiting our properties for the shared areas of our buildings to be kept free from any personal belongings. This is a requirement set out in all tenancy or lease agreements and we regularly check to see that this is applied.

Items like shoes and shoe-racks, pot plants, tables, bikes and scooters for example are not allowed in shared areas because they increase the risk of fires starting and may block escape routes or access for emergency services.

If items are found in shared areas, we will ask the owners to remove them immediately and if they are not removed, we arrange for their removal and disposal then charge the cost of this back to the owner. We are unable to store any items that we remove.

We understand when some residents are not happy for their items to be removed, but it is really important to make sure that the shared areas of our buildings are kept safe at all times and we ask for your co-operation to make sure this is the case by reporting items left in shared areas and by keeping all personal belongings in your own homes. For more information, please contact your Communal Services Team Leader or visit our website.

## Meet Peter, our new Resident Involvement Manager



At the end of 2016 we said a very fond farewell to Anna De Souza who was our Resident Involvement Manager for many years and who many residents knew well. The good news is that we now say a warm welcome to Peter, who has taken up this important role and has already been getting out and about to meet residents and progress our Resident Involvement Strategy to ensure that all residents can be involved in shaping our services.

Peter has over 20 years of experience in resident and community engagement, working with residents and resident groups in Broxbourne, Islington, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Westminster to name a few. In his last role Peter led and won an award for his successful Resident Involvement service so we are very pleased to have him on the Octavia team.

Peter said "knowing some of the long history and community ethos behind Octavia Housing and its founder, it's a real privilege to have the opportunity to contribute my skills and experience to this role. I want to build on the very good work that already takes place here and work with residents to strengthen what works well and to look at ways we can ensure the avenues that we use to give residents the opportunities to have a say in shaping the services they receive are the ones that suit them best."

If you want to get in touch with Peter or are interested in resident involvement, or simply want to know more, please give him a call or drop him an email [be.involved@octavia.org.uk](mailto:be.involved@octavia.org.uk)

## Tenancy fraud

Our homes are in great demand. Many families and individuals are in need of decent, affordable housing in the Capital and so we have dedicated Investigation Officers who work hard to ensure that our homes are being used to house those most in need.

We recently successfully recovered a two-bedroom property following a suspicion raised. After investigations were carried out, it revealed that the tenant was running a business abroad and not occupying the Octavia property as a main and principal home. Following a formal interview under caution and to avoid further legal action, we were able to get the home returned to us, which we are now able to use to rehouse a family in need.

The Prevention of Social Housing Act 2013 has made it is a criminal offence to either:

1. sub-let a property dishonestly or
2. sub-let or stop living in a property, knowing it is a breach of tenancy.

If you suspect someone is committing tenancy fraud, or is no longer living at their Octavia property as their main home, please call our Tenancy Fraud Hotline on [020 8354 5575](tel:02083545575). All information received will be taken seriously and treated in the strictest confidence.



Congratulations to Tony Corballis who was the winner of the resident annual report competition. We asked everyone for their comments and those who gave them were entered into a prize draw for £50 of shopping vouchers.

If you would like to give feedback on the report then please email us at [update@octavia.org.uk](mailto:update@octavia.org.uk). Sadly, the competition is now over but we are always keen to hear your thoughts.

## Transfers

Our transfer list is currently holding over 500 tenants wanting a transfer – this ranges from wanting a larger or smaller property, to needing to move for medical reasons.

Some of our residents have been on the list for several years, in a number of cases over 10 years.

We review the circumstances of residents on the transfer list every year to check that their needs have not changed. The last review closed on 25 November and we are now looking at responses. If you participated in the review and raised an issue, our Lettings team or the Resident Services Officers will be in touch.

Please remember that a housing transfer can take a very long time so it is always worth considering a Mutual Exchange. To find out more visit:

➤ [www.exchangelocata.org.uk](http://www.exchangelocata.org.uk)

➤ [www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk)

➤ [www.movemakerapp.co.uk](http://www.movemakerapp.co.uk)

If you are over 60 and would consider moving out of London, the Seaside & Country Homes Scheme may be for you. Visit [www.housingmoves.org.uk](http://www.housingmoves.org.uk).

All these schemes are free to register for Octavia residents.

## Requesting or tracking a repair?

Good news! Our repairs line (0800 479 0011) it is now free even from mobile phones. If you have a repair please call this number (not our general number) as you will get straight through to the repairs team.

If you call after 5pm Monday to Friday and during the weekend, we operate an emergency only repairs service with our contractors, Mears on [020 3589 3078](tel:02035893078) (although please note this is not a freephone number).

Please be aware that if an operative is sent out to you and they find it is not an emergency you will be recharged the cost of the visit.

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## Want to give feedback on your neighbourhood?



Twice a year, we organise a 'Walkabout Wednesday' where a large number of staff, many of whom would not regularly visit homes or residents as part of their usual roles, get the chance to go out and meet residents and see Octavia schemes in order to feedback on the services we deliver, and to identify where improvements to properties might be made.

In October we held our latest Walkabout. Overall, 90% of residents we visited were satisfied with our services, and staff came up with a number of ideas for improvements based on the feedback they heard. The ideas gathered will be taken forward over the next 6 months, which include consulting with residents in W10 on the introduction of a cleaning service, additional planting at a scheme in W2, and seeing if improvements can be made to a bin storage area in W9.

### **Coming soon – joint staff and resident Walkabouts.**

In the Spring, residents at Wilcove Estate, Wilsham Street Estate and Bourbon Lane Estate will take part in the Walkabouts with the Communal Services team, Resident Services Officers and Surveyors. Details will be posted on Octavia notice boards, or alternatively, if you would like to take part please contact your Communal Services Team Leader.

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## Help with budgeting and managing money

Christmas can be an expensive time of year for everyone. If you would like help in making 2017 a year when you take better control of your finances, we can help. We offer confidential one to one advice on debt, budgeting or even how to save more or make more money. Why not take our money quiz online and test your skills or get in touch with your income officer who can help or can refer you to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). The CAB hold surgeries at our offices and give excellent advice free of charge and completely confidentially to Octavia residents.

# 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. We are doing well in a number of services, and will be looking to improve on how quickly we respond to complaints.

Performance indicator	October 2016	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	4.96%	4.8%	☹️
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	99.92%	100.1%	☹️
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	99%	98%	😊
% of routine repairs completed within target time	100%	98%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (switchboard)	16	20	☹️
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	10	20	😊
% responses to complaints within target time	89%	99%	☹️
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from completed repairs survey)	95%	95%	😊



## Got an email address? Then let us know!

Let us know if you have an email address, so that going forward we can send your newsletters via email. All you have to do is visit our website to sign up to receiving e-Newsletters. It saves trees and saves on the cost of postage.

## Learn more about condensation and damp

### Come along to an event on 15 February at 4.30pm at Octavia Head office, Emily House, W10 5BN

Understand the causes, symptoms and cures for damp and ask our condensation expert, Wayne Anderson any questions you might have on the topic.

If you would like to attend this session, then please call Joyce Dominique on [020 8354 5556](tel:02083545556) to book a place.

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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