

EDITION 33: AUTUMN 2018 - Simple, up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

OCTAVIA IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD



We are always looking for new ways to engage with our residents in their community. On 29 September we invited residents in the W10 and W11 postcodes to join us for an 'Octavia in your neighbourhood' event at our new community space - The Reed in Convent Garden.

The event was an opportunity for us to answer questions, offer help or advice and provide local residents with information about our latest services. We had a fun packed day with activities, games, street food and entertainment for all ages including a DJ, balloon artist, bingo, face painting, digital media workshops and arts and crafts. We had over 100 residents join us throughout the day and for lunch.

Thank you to those who came along.

As part of the day we had a cake sale and the money raised will go to help the Grenfell Tower Appeal Fund.

We look forward to holding more neighbourhood events in the New Year.

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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)

Contact centre:

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

W www.octaviahousing.org.uk



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Our neighbourhood event was the first time some residents had visited The Reed. As well as holding regular community events, The Reed hosts daily activities for older people and a free digital youth club for younger people four evenings a week.

The facility is the home of the Kensington Day Centre (KDC) - and it has become almost a second home to Stanley the dog (pictured here). Stanley is a therapy pooch who visits the KDC every Friday and has become quite the celebrity with KDC members.

For more information about activities at The Reed, go to: www.octaviasupport.org.uk/

Paying your rent

We are seeing more residents struggling as a result of the new benefit changes. We are here to offer help and advice if you need it. We can help you to manage your money, access jobs and training and apply for benefits. We can also help you with managing debt.

Paying your rent is a priority and your home is at risk if you fall behind with your rent payments.

If you are having difficulty paying your rent, have large debts, or receive any letters from your income officer about missed payments, you should contact us straight away so that we can help you to get back on track. If you do not respond to us we cannot help you and we are forced to follow the arrears procedure, which could result in you losing your home.

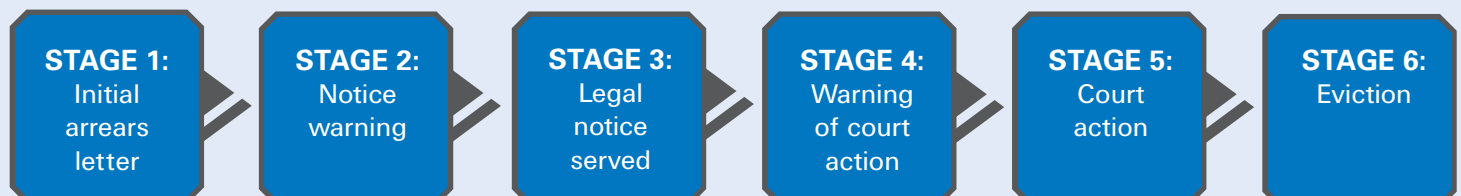
If you are finding it difficult to make payments, we will be able to help you. The following assistance is available to you:

- ▶ A Financial Inclusion Specialist within the income team, who can help you budget and maximise your income.
- ▶ Citizens Advice, who see residents at our office every Thursday and Friday and will be able to help you if you have debt or benefit problems.
- ▶ A Floating Support Team, specifically for people over 50. They can help support you if you are experiencing difficulties.
- ▶ An Employment Team, who can help you find a new job or access training.
- ▶ An Energy Advice Team, who can potentially save you up to £200 off your Gas and Electricity bills per year.

To access any of the above services, please contact us on [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500).

We want to help you stay in your home so please contact us for help.

Our Arrears Procedure step by step:



Silver celebrations across our schemes



Octavia held open house events across several schemes on the first Sunday in October in celebration of Silver Sunday.

James Hill House, The Reed and Leonora House held events for older people including, afternoon teas, live music and visiting performance groups.

Silver Sunday is an annual event that celebrates community and aims to tackle loneliness and social isolation among older people by getting them out and about and meeting people in their neighbourhood.

Silver Sunday started as a campaign in Westminster in 2012 and was so successful that it has continued every year since. It is now a well-supported national event. We were thrilled this year to be visited by Lady Christabel Flight, one of the founders of Silver Sunday, who attended the celebrations at James Hill House extra care scheme.

Festivities at Leonora House included Irish dancers, the dancing theater group 'Bus Stop to Broadway' and a resident DJ. The Reed also had a visit from the Bus Stop dancers, along with afternoon teas served by Octavia staff.

Keeping communal areas clear and tidy

Our top priority is resident safety. It is really important for the shared areas of buildings to be kept free from any personal belongings because they can be a fire risk. In all tenancy and lease agreements, we make it clear that all shared areas need to be free of items and belongings and we do regular checks to make sure they are.

Communal areas need to be clear of items like shoes, shoe-racks, pot plants, tables, bikes, buggies and scooters 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 ask the owners to remove them immediately. If they are not removed we arrange for their removal and disposal, and charge the cost of this back to the owner or the block. We are unable to store items that we remove.



We understand when residents are not happy for their items to be removed, but it is really important to ensure that the shared areas of our buildings are kept safe at all times, and we ask for your co-operation by reporting items left in shared areas and by keeping all personal belongings in your own homes.

Last year we launched our cleaning standards photobook to help us monitor our cleaning and ground maintenance services. This offers useful guidance to residents on how we are doing at keeping communal areas clean. You can view the photobook on our website: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/shared-areas-car-parks-and-gardens/cleaning-and-caretaking.

You may have noticed newly designed notice boards at your scheme. These are used to communicate communal inspection dates and other useful information, such as how to report a repair and they are also a great way for us to tell you what is going on in your neighbourhood.

For more information about communal services, please call **0208 354 5500**.

Are you on top of the benefit changes?



Universal Credit is the new benefit to help unemployed people, or those on a low income, to pay their living expenses and/or housing costs. The benefit is designed to support people into work and prepare them for receiving one monthly payment, in the same way as people get paid once a month when working.

It replaces Income Support, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.

If you experience changes in your circumstances you may be moved to Universal Credit, so it is important that you are pro-active in quickly submitting your online claim to ensure you do not miss out on payments you are entitled to. You also need to manage any online tasks you are asked to do.

It is important not to ignore any messages you receive from Jobcentre Plus and remember to report any changes in your circumstances via your online claim.

If you want to know more about how to manage Universal Credit, speak to an income officer or call [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500) for more information. We are here to help.

The KDC is looking for new members



The Kensington Day Centre at The Reed is a great space for people to meet, eat, get active or be creative, with the support of our friendly on-site day care team and we are currently looking for new members. Whether you want to visit for a few hours to just relax, chat, enjoy a meal with friends or to take part in the daily activities - there is something for all RBKC older adults who need some care and support.

Octavia can arrange accessible transport that picks you up at a convenient time and takes you home again safely.

Any older person living in RBKC can join the KDC. If you want to know more about membership, for yourself or for a relative, contact: martha.moran@octavia.org.uk.

Kensington Credit Union

On 9 October 'Your Credit Union', the Kensington and Chelsea Credit Union, ceased trading. We were supporters of the Credit Union and helped to get the organisation up and running back in 2012. Sadly in more recent times, it made losses and was unable to continue.

If you banked with the credit union, they will have written to you already to reassure you that your money is safe as it was fully supported by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). You should have received any money that you saved with them within seven days.

If you have taken out a loan from Your Credit Union you should continue to pay your instalments and the FCA will be in touch with you about this soon.

For further information please visit the Your Credit Union website: www.yourcu.co.uk or contact the Financial Services Compensations Scheme at: www.fscs.org.uk/news

60 secondsWith Octavia's contact centre manager Kim



Our contact centre is staffed by a specialist team who are trained to deal with enquiries and service requests by phone and email.

When you call Octavia on 020 8354 5500 or email us to request a service, it is a member of the contact centre who will answer your call and help you with your enquiry.

We asked the service manager, Kim to answer some common questions residents have about telephone services available from Octavia.

How does the contact centre improve services for residents?

Residents tell us they want a friendly service and they want their enquiries dealt with in one phone call. The 020 8354 5500 telephone line is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, and can help with dozens of services Octavia provides to tenants. By calling the contact centre you can speak to a member of staff directly. All of our calls are logged, and service requests can be tracked, which makes it easier for us keep track of an enquiry and ensures we get back to residents quickly.

What housing services can residents receive by using the contact centre?

The contact centre phone line deals with a whole range of housing enquiries – many of which we can quickly deal with during the call.

Some of our most requested services are about rent account enquiries. Tenants can phone us for updates on their rent account, including finding out the balance on their account, making a payment, or setting up (or changing) a direct debit. We can also help tenants who need the support of a payment plan to manage rent arrears.

Another big area for us is helping tenants who are seeking to transfer to another social rent home or undertake a mutual exchange. We can make initial checks via the application process to ensure that this is something the tenant is able to do. We can also fully explain the process, and if they are able to go ahead, even get their application started by letting them know what they need to do next. We can also provide them with any forms that need to be completed. This can save a lot of time with getting an application underway.

Is the contact centre mainly for housing enquiries?

No, we do much more than that - from arranging Floating Support and Home Adaptations for older residents to advice on home improvements. We are not quite a one-stop-shop for all services but we should be the first port of call if you want to speak to someone at Octavia by phone. Even if the contact centre cannot provide the service you seek immediately, chances are they will be able to quickly direct you to someone who can.

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What do residents like most about using the contact centre?

Residents say they really appreciate being able to speak to someone at a time that suits them and being able to get help – even it is just advice and information – when they need it. The contact centre handles emails to Octavia too and this is often the preferred form of contact by residents with less urgent enquiries. We respond to most emails on the day we receive them.

What other improvements are you planning?

As well as developing our contact centre services, we are also upgrading our online self-service portal for tenants and we will be launching a new website and mobile app in the New Year. The new mobile app will enable residents to access their rent account information and other services, such as reporting a repair, from their smart phone. Look out for further information about this on our website and social media channels closer to the launch.

The **020 8354 5500** phone line is open 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays). For more information about how to contact Octavia, go to: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/contact-us

Future of social housing



The government published a consultation paper called 'A New Deal for Social Housing' in September this year.

This document could shape social housing in coming years.

It sets out some areas for improvement in the way social housing works, including:

- ▶ Ways to make sure residents have a stronger voice and are listened to.
- ▶ Information about landlords' performance that residents might like to receive.
- ▶ Landlords and residents working together to make sure homes are safe and in good condition.
- ▶ Ways to combat the negative perceptions of social housing held by some people.

The full consultation paper is available on the following government website page:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-new-deal-for-social-housing

It is likely to take several months for the government to work through all the responses they have received, and to publish more definite proposals.

We will keep you updated on this in future newsletters.

The Pop Up Business School is back



After the success of the Pop Up Business School in July, it's coming back to Westminster for another two weeks in November.

Residents can sign up to attend free seminars and workshops tailored to support anyone who has, or is thinking of starting, a small business. The event is run by experts and covers everything from low cost ways to test the profitability of your business idea and managing business accounts, to how to create your own free website. The event is completely free to attend.

The Pop Up Business School will run from 26 November to 7 December at Paddington Arts, W9. For more information, and to register, go to www.popupbusinessschool.co.uk/events.html

Resident events



We hold a wide range of events throughout the year to give you opportunities to meet us and share your views with us in a more relaxed environment. The following events are taking place in November:

- ▶ Illumina House and Spectra Apartments Residents Meeting – on Tuesday 6 November at 6.15pm at Wandsworth Quaker House.
- ▶ Princes Place scheme visit – on Wednesday 14 November.

If you would like to know more about resident events, please email be.involved@octavia.org.uk or visit our website: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/news-events/events

Our performance

We set ambitious targets for our performance for the year and work hard to reach them by the end of the business year in March 2019. A summary of how we are doing in key areas is below.

We are doing well in a number of areas this year so far including, completing emergency repairs on time and responding to reported anti-social behaviour quickly. In the last few months we have made particular improvements on re-letting our void properties quickly and responding to complaints within target time. We will continue to monitor these areas closely to make sure we improve further and meet the targets set.

Performance indicator	August 2018	End March 2019 Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	4.79%	4.5%	☹️
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	100.4%	100.5%	☹️
Average re-let time in days (year to date)	24	22	☹️
% of emergency repairs completed within target time	100%	99%	😊
% of urgent repairs completed within target time	98.6%	99%	☹️
% of routine repairs completed within target time	99.9%	98%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (Switchboard)	20	20	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	22	20	☹️
% responses to complaints within target time	90%	99%	☹️
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service	93%	95%	☹️

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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