

EDITION 40: AUTUMN 2020 - Simple, up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

## UPDATE NEWSLETTER

### Message from Octavia's Chief Executive



We hope you are keeping safe and well during the continuing health emergency.

Keeping our services to you going, while at the same time taking steps to keep everyone safe, has been our main priority over the last few months. This means that we have had to adapt the way we do things in some areas. We have also not let the pandemic stop us from delivering essential services, wherever possible, and we have been innovative in finding new ways to continue to support people who have needed it during this difficult time.

In this newsletter, you will find a round-up of the current changes to our usual ways of working, including how we are continuing to carry out repairs, enabling new residents to move into homes and keeping younger people occupied through our community activities.

Our website has the latest information on our service changes, as well as information on the help and support available to you and others in your neighbourhood, so please keep checking this for updates. You can find this at: [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/covid-19](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/covid-19).

We are constantly seeking better ways of making our newsletters useful for you, so if you have any suggestions, comments or feedback, please send them to us at [update@octavia.org.uk](mailto:update@octavia.org.uk).

Sandra Skeete



#### Helping people affected by the pandemic

If you are in financial difficulty and worried about paying your rent or service charge, please talk to us, as we may be able to provide you with advice or put you in touch with agencies that can help. Benefits support is available for people whose income has been affected by COVID-19, so contact us if you need help with finding out if this is applicable to you.

We have more information about financial support available for people on our website at:

[www.octaviahousing.org.uk/covid-19/](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/covid-19/)

If you are looking for a job, we can also put you in touch with organisations that can help so contact us if you would like our assistance.

In July, we provided support or advice to more than 1,100 residents and other local people, through:

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What do you think of this newsletter?

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

#### Contact us

Repairs: T 020 8354 5500 (including emergency out-of-hours)

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

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



- Shopping for extra care residents who are self-isolating or shielding
- Providing food bank vouchers to those who need emergency food help
- Helping people experiencing financial difficulties access debt and welfare advice
- Providing life-changing social contact to older or more vulnerable people who are facing social isolation
- Supporting people who have lost employment income with new Universal Credit claims

To provide further support to people claiming benefits, anyone who moves onto Universal Credit from Income Support, Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance or Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, now receives a new one-time payment that amounts to an extra two weeks' worth of funds. This is known as a 'run-on payment' and it's in place to ease the transition for people moving from the old-style benefits system to Universal Credit. If this applies to you, you will be awarded your old and new benefits at the same time for a period of two weeks, and the additional payment does not have to be repaid. If you qualify for this, you will receive the additional payment automatically, so you should not need to take any action.

For further advice about benefits you may be entitled to, or if you need support with other difficulties you are facing, contact us on [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500).

## Need to report a repair?



Our contractors have worked hard over the last few months to keep our repairs service going. This has been to ensure that all emergency repairs, and the majority of urgent works, are being safely dealt with within our usual timeframes.

In the last few weeks we have increased the number of routine repairs we carry out, where we can do so safely, and this is always in accordance with government COVID-19 guidelines.

If you have a repair that you have not reported yet, please do so. Even if we can't carry it out straight away, we are keeping a record of anything outstanding so we can complete these as soon as we can.

We want to thank everyone for working with us through this period. We do still need to ask you some health safety questions when we talk to you to arrange an appointment, and please remember to maintain a two-metre social distance when our operatives are in your home. We also ask that you help us by ensuring the area our operatives need to work in is clean and clear from your belongings when they arrive.

You can report repairs from 9-5pm, Monday to Friday via the usual number, [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500). You can also contact us outside of these hours to report emergency repairs only.

## Making our app even better



Many residents are now using our app, My Octavia, to check their rent balance and access rent statements. As well as providing instant access to rent information, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, My Octavia also enables you to track your reported repairs, check the status of your home gas safety certificate, update your contact details, and to contact us directly. It also provides access to paying rent.

Now we are developing the app to include even more useful services. Later this year you will be able to report repairs directly to us through the app. So look out for notifications about this update.

More than 1,000 residents are already using My Octavia. If you if you are not using it yet, go to [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/MyOctavia](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/MyOctavia) to find out how to download the app and get started.

We will be contacting all app users within the next few weeks to get your feedback on it, so please look out for an email or text from us and tell us what you think.



## Home viewings have gone virtual

Because of social distancing restrictions, we are unable to hold face-to-face viewings for our vacant homes so we have adapted the way we offer this service by taking it virtual instead.

Octavia's homes sales and lettings teams have created video virtual tours of our new and empty properties for rent or sale, so that viewers can see around them without leaving home. It's proving popular, and not just for COVID-19 safety reasons. People are finding it's often a quicker and more convenient way to view a potential new home.



New Octavia shared ownership homes in Maida Vale

The virtual tours have to be booked in advance and they work across all desktop PCs, smartphones and tablets. We currently have virtual tours available for several different developments for both lettings and sales and we will be rolling out more in the future. See [www.octavialiving.org.uk](http://www.octavialiving.org.uk) to find out more, or contact us on 020 8354 5500.



## Thank you for the thank yous

With most of us spending more time at home, our caretaking service has become more essential than ever. Many residents have contacted us to thank us for all the extra effort our caretakers have been putting in to look after people and keep the areas around your home safe and clean.

Many residents have shown their appreciation through leaving kind messages in areas where our colleagues work. Others have shown their appreciation by simply saying 'thank you'. This is very much appreciated by our caretaking staff. In turn, we want to thank you for your support, cooperation, and understanding as we manage the current situation.



## Lockdown easing for care services



Since lockdown started in March our Care colleagues have been focused on protecting older, vulnerable people who live in our homes and use our services. We have been supporting people to keep in contact with their families and friends via telephone and video calls but with the easing of some of these tight restrictions, we are really pleased to be able to allow face-to-face (distanced) visits to our extra care schemes again.

As well as keeping people safe, our carers have also paid special attention to supporting the wellbeing of residents, through engaging activities including arts and crafts, Zoom yoga and exercise bike sessions.

Residents from one scheme recently revealed their creative flair through their own art exhibition attended by their friends and family. The socially distanced event was shared live with residents in other schemes via video streaming.

Outside of our homes, our adaptations service, which arranges changes to people's homes and installs specialist equipment to enable them to continue to live independently, is also getting back to normal, with a few extra checks to manage risks.

Not all of our services for older people have resumed, so for some people we are continuing to provide the support put in place when lockdown started - keeping in regular contact through doorstep visits and delivering meals through a project we have with Chelsea Football Club.

## Introducing 'call around' Wednesdays

Usually at this time of the year, Octavia staff get out of the office and door-knock to meet and talk to residents during what we call - our "Walkabout Wednesdays". Unfortunately, we had to suspend this activity this summer due to COVID-19, but rather than be put off, we arranged for the exercise to take place over the phone.

Our first "Call-around Wednesday" in July gathered feedback on how well our communications with residents has worked during the pandemic. More than 30 members of staff from across Octavia took part and between them they spoke to 223 residents from 26 developments. From the residents we spoke to, 81% said they were satisfied with the cleanliness of their scheme, 69% had been in touch with us since the lockdown period and 72% were satisfied with their last contact with us. We received feedback on some suggested areas for improvement too, and we are looking into these.

We really enjoyed speaking to everyone, this is particularly true of colleagues who have few opportunities to meet and speak to residents on a regular basis. Thank you to everyone who found the time to talk to us.

## Octavia Hampstead shop reopens

In March, we had to close our charity shops in line with the Government's measures on preventing the spread of COVID-19. Now, following weeks of careful planning, we are starting to re-open them so that we can continue to raise much-needed funds for our communities.

Our shop in South End Road, Hampstead, has been the first to re-open its doors. It opened at the end of last month after a range of safety measures were put in place. These include a one-way system, protective equipment for staff and sanitising stations at the shop entrance.

We are also welcoming donations again at the shop but to ensure we can process them safely, we have set up a booking system for people to drop them off. If you would like to book a slot to drop off your donations, please call the shop on 020 7435 3453 during opening hours, Wednesday to Sunday, 11am-4pm.



Our website is being kept updated on the latest information about our shop re-openings.

## Fire safety - please keep shared areas free from personal belongings



It is really important for the safety of all residents and others visiting our properties that shared areas inside and around homes are kept free from any personal belongings. This is a requirement set out in all tenancy or lease agreements and we regularly check our homes to ensure it is being followed.

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 ask the owners to remove them immediately and if they are not removed, we will 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. We ask for your co-operation by keeping all personal belongings in your own homes and reporting items left in shared areas to us. For more information about fire safety, go to:

[www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/living-in-your-home-and-neighbourhood/fire-and-home-safety](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/living-in-your-home-and-neighbourhood/fire-and-home-safety)

## Highlighting fire door safety



Fire doors play an important role in keeping people safe. A fire door is an engineered safety device that is a crucial part of the fire protection measures in all of our buildings. Although it acts like any other door, its prime purpose is to delay the spread of fire and smoke; protecting lives and property.

To help raise awareness of the importance of fire doors, Octavia has once again pledged its support to this year's Fire Door Safety Week campaign. Part of the campaign is to highlight that everyone has an important part to play in both using fire doors correctly and in reporting any concerns over ill-fitting, damaged or poorly functioning fire doors.



Fire doors must never be wedged open and they must be kept in a good state of repair. There are five quick checks anyone can undertake to ensure a fire door is working correctly:

1. Certification - look for a label or plug on top (or occasionally on the side) of the door. All fire doors will carry a certification.
2. Gaps - check the gaps around the top and sides of the door are consistently less than 4mm when the door is closed. The gap under the door can be slightly larger (up to 8mm), but it does depend on the door. Ideally, you should not see light under the door.

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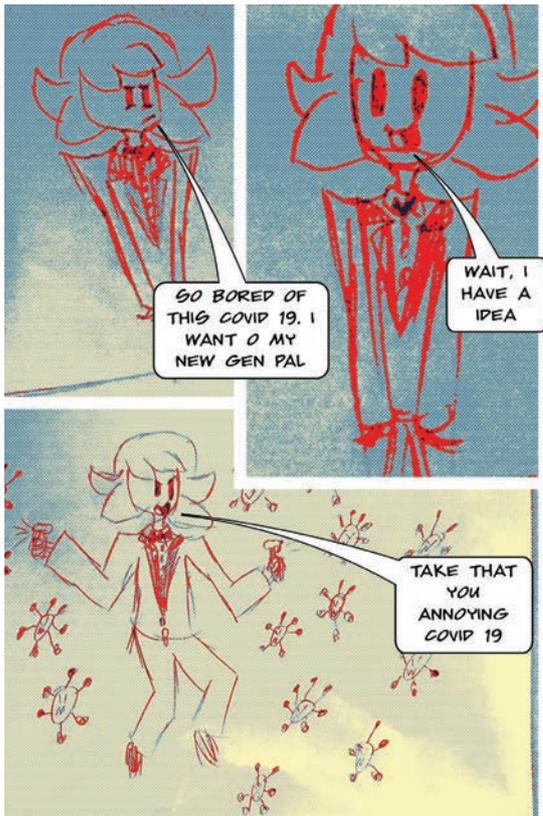
3. Seals - check the seals around the door or frame. Check they're intact with no sign of damage.
4. Hinges - check all hinges are firmly fixed (three or more of them), with no missing or broken screws.
5. Closing properly - check the door closes firmly onto the latch without sticking on the floor or the frame.

We regularly inspect our properties, carrying out fire risk assessments and repairs as required. We would like to thank you for your continued support in allowing our contractors access to enable them to conduct these important safety checks. If you notice a potential problem with a fire door (including flat entrance doors), please report it to the Repairs team.

[www.firedoorsafetyweek.co.uk/](http://www.firedoorsafetyweek.co.uk/)



## BASE@Home is a hit



Our virtual youth club Base@Home has been keeping young people busy and entertained during lockdown and beyond with a range of free and fun digital media training activities. Firing up their imaginations through film, music and content creation, Base@Home gives young people the opportunity to learn something new and connect with others in a relaxed and welcoming environment.

The summer programme proved very popular and featured a smartphone filmmaking project exploring mental health during lockdown and a podcast project. Sessions are open to residents and other local people aged 10 to 21 (and to 27 with additional needs). If you are interested in joining in, or you know a young person who is, please sign up via this link: <http://bit.ly/basehomesignup>. You can also catch up on what our Base@Home participants have been up to since the start of lockdown via our instagram account - @weareoctavia.



## Are you struggling with your energy bills or know someone who is?

We work in partnership with Green Doctors, an organisation that provides free telephone consultations to help residents get on top of energy debt through switching energy provider, accessing grants and other financial and wellbeing support, and managing home energy use.

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This service is available for free to anyone who is:

- on a low income; or
- over 65; or
- with a child under 10; or
- with a long-term health condition or disability

To book a consultation:

- Call freephone number: 0300 365 3005, or
- Register on our website:  
<https://groundwork.secure.force.com/enquiry/>  
or
- Email: [GreenDoctorsLDN@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:GreenDoctorsLDN@groundwork.org.uk)

British Sign Language interpretation and language interpretation for non-English speakers is available.



## Home improvements - what changes can I make?



With spare time on our hands, many of us have been working our way through that DIY 'to do' list during lockdown. To make your mark on your home, we recognise that you may want to make improvements that match your needs and requirements. We are happy for you to make changes such as decorating and putting up shelves, without our permission.

For everything else (such as fitting a new kitchen or bathroom, installing hard wood or vinyl flooring, putting up a television aerial, decorating the outside of your home or adding to or changing installations, fixtures or fittings) please send your request in writing to [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk).

We are flexible in allowing you to make these alterations to your home, once you have lived there for over 12 months, but you will need written permission from us before you start work. The service includes an administration fee, which will be based on 15% of the value of the works up to a maximum of £75.

As well as our written permission, you will also need to get any other approval you need for the work, such as planning permission or any building regulations approval (if required).

For more information, visit our website [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/repairs-home-maintenance/alterations-to-your-home](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/repairs-home-maintenance/alterations-to-your-home)



## Our performance

We check on our 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 areas including completing repairs on time and managing rent arrears. Our performance in a few areas were impacted by COVID-19 and the lockdown. Average re-let times have been high as we re-start lettings and work through a backlog of void properties from April and May. Average call answering time in our contact centre was higher than normal, but we have introduced improved call handling software for our staff working from home. We expect performance in both areas to improve over the coming months.

Performance indicator	June 2020	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % of rent due (general needs)	4.6%	4.9%	😊
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	99.2%	99.3%	😐
Average number of days it takes to re-let our homes	110	30	😞
% of emergency repairs completed within target time*	100%	99%	😊
% of urgent repairs completed within target time	100%	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 (customer contact team)	37	20	😞
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	7	20	😊
Average time to respond to complaints (in days)	7	10	😊
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from our completed repairs survey)	88%	95%	😐

\*This excludes the small backlog of repairs from the lockdown period.

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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