

EDITION 41: WINTER 2020 - Simple, up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

Message from our Chief Executive



Welcome to our end of year newsletter. I hope you and those close to you are well and are able to spend the holidays enjoying some time together, within the current rules governing the restrictions on social mixing.

This year has been a very testing time for all of us. We have responded throughout by putting the health and safety of residents and colleagues first and will continue to do so. We have had to change the way we deliver some of our services in response to the Government's lockdown restrictions and I'd like to thank you for your patience and understanding with this. We are continuing to prioritise supporting people as much as possible through the crisis, while remaining focused throughout on providing good quality services. If you are facing difficulties, particularly if your income has been affected by the pandemic, talk to us – as we may be able to help.

The year has been a very isolating time for many people, especially older or more vulnerable residents and those who live alone, so we've stepped in to provide increased support. We are very grateful to our volunteers, who have been wonderful with helping us ensure older, isolated people have someone they know to talk to regularly. They have also entertained older residents with engaging activities in the absence of our usual festive celebrations at this time of year and assisted us with keeping our young people connected.

Please continue to reach out to your neighbours if you feel they might need some extra support, where it is safe to do so - and let us know if you have any concerns about the wellbeing or safety of anyone in your community. We are here to help.

Wishing you a happy, and well, Christmas and New Year, Sandra Skeete



Covid-19 update

The Government has put in place a Tier system across the country to help control the spread of Covid-19. Areas are placed in Tiers 1 to 3, with Tier 3 representing the highest alert level with the greatest level of restrictions. These levels are regularly reviewed. It's important to remember that, with the exception of the special arrangements allowed for Christmas, we must limit our social contacts and activity outside our home in line with the Government's Tier Level for London.

Please continue to report repairs so we can carry these out, where it is safe to do so. We are also continuing to carry out all essential health and safety works, such as gas, boiler and electricity safety checks so please allow us to enter your home for these important appointments. Our colleagues and contractors will follow Covid-19 health and safety precautions while in your home. For up to date information on our services, go to www.octaviahousing.org.uk/covid-19.

What do you think of this newsletter?

Let us know at: E.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
 W www.octaviahousing.org.uk

Spreading some kindness at Christmas



This year has been especially difficult for many of those in our communities who are older or more vulnerable. Our volunteers have been working closely with us to ensure our older residents received some festive fun and greetings in the run-up to Christmas. With all of our usual parties and group activities restricted because of the need to socially distance, colleagues ensured our older residents received some Christmas cheer in other ways. Virtual activities and events, personalised Christmas cards, and socially distanced visits from Santa helped raise spirits.

Please continue to look out for your neighbours and contact us if there is someone who you feel is not getting all the support they need. Everyone should feel safe in their home and not suffer from being threatened from violence or abuse. If you have any concerns about the safety of anyone in your community, please speak to us on **020 8354 5500**.

Our shops are opening again

With the, hopefully continual, easing of Covid-19 restrictions, our charity shops are opening again. To shop locally, sustainably and to help raise funds for local community projects please pop into your local Octavia charity shop.

We are also welcoming donations again so if you are having a Christmas clear out of your pre-loved fashion, please bring your items to an open Octavia shop. For full details on Octavia shop opening times and how to donate, visit our website: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/charity_shops



Have a happy, and safe holiday



We want everyone to have a safe, as well as a happy, Christmas so please be fire safety aware with using lighting and Christmas decorations. We've prepared a quick fire prevention safety checklist to help:

- Lights - Check Christmas lights are in good working order. All lights, new and used, should carry the British Safety Standard sign. If yours don't, buy some that do and recycle your old ones. Any lights not working properly need to be replaced.
- Decorations - Never place candles or a heat source near your decorations or any other materials that can catch light easily. And don't attach decorations to lights or heaters as they can burn easily. Keep candles, lighters and matches out of children's reach and never leave a lit candle unattended.

Continued over...

- Christmas trees - Whether your tree is artificial or real, it can be a fire hazard. Keep it away from heat sources and keep a fresh tree watered so it does not dry out, making it more of a fire risk.
- Electricity - Don't overload electric plug sockets and always switch lights and appliances off at the wall before you go to bed.
- Cooking - Most fires start in the kitchen, so don't leave your cooker unattended, or forget to switch it off.
- Check your smoke alarms every month.

Stay safe this Christmas



Help with keeping energy bills down



Our warm homes partner, Green Doctors, is continuing to offer free advice consultations aimed at keeping your home warm. Making good use of heating controls is an effective way to keep your home warm, particularly while a lot of us are spending more time at home during the current restrictions.

If you have an electric storage heater, setting your controls can be tricky. The Green Doctors can offer specific advice for these types of heaters. They can also make sure you're on the right 'economy 7' electricity tariff to work with your storage heaters.

The free consultation is designed to help you get on top of your home energy use. Consultations with British Sign Language interpreters (via video call) and language interpreters for non-English speakers are available. To book a consultation with a Green Doctor, contact the Green Doctor team at Groundwork London at: <https://london.greendoctors.org.uk/> or 0300 365 3005 (free phone number). There is more information about the scheme on our website: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/rent-and-money/energy-advice



Give us your feedback on our app



Our My Octavia app is proving a popular way for residents to check their rent statements, monitor progress on their reported repairs and to contact us at a time convenient for them. More than 1,200 residents are now using the app and we are developing new features to improve it.

Early next year we will be extending the repairs functionality to enable you to report repairs and schedule a date for a repairs operator to visit your home, directly through the app. App users will receive an email when the development is live and you will need to update the app on your phone to benefit from the new feature.

We are keen to get your feedback on My Octavia. We want to know how you think it can be improved further and what extra services you would like to see added. Please help us by going to: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/app-survey and completing the short survey. You must be a current app user to take part and everyone entering will be invited to enter a free prize draw for a chance to win a £50 Amazon voucher.



New financial help advice line

We have launched a new Advice Line to support residents who may be facing financial difficulty. The new service is designed to provide a targeted service for residents seeking help with managing money and maximising their income.

From December, residents seeking our help with financial worries or benefits concerns can call our Advice Line to find out how we can help. Then if needed, we can arrange a longer follow-up appointment with someone from our Financial Inclusion team for further support.

Follow-up, pre-booked appointments can offer help with:



- Budgeting and maximising your income
- Benefits eligibility and benefits claims checks
- Prioritising bills, grants and payment arrangements

The new Advice Line is run completely by Octavia staff and it replaces our Citizens Advice service drop-ins, as we are now holding our own sessions instead.

The Advice Line is open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 9.30am and 11am. Call us on **020 8354 5500**.

More than 95% of residents seeking financial help contact us because of concerns about benefits. Our Financial Inclusion colleagues have nearly 30 years' experience of delivering benefits and money advice and are best placed to help.

Octavia Financial Inclusion Manager, Pauline, said: "The worry of meeting rent payments can cause considerable anxiety. Our new service is designed to help provide speedier outcomes for people seeking all kinds of advice about managing their money and this can help lessen the stress for people in difficulty." If you are struggling financially, speak to your Income Account Manager about it as soon as possible. We can provide a number of services that can help, including issuing you with food bank vouchers. Please remember that paying your rent is a priority. If you don't keep up with your payments you could lose your home. Talk to us if you feel you need help.



Lockdown fun and games for extra care residents



Residents at Octavia extra care schemes are keeping entertained during lockdown by playing interactive games designed for those living with dementia.

The technology, which can be played on any flat surface, uses images, lights, and sound to encourage people to play a range of interactive games in their social bubble, including virtual gardening, splashing in rock pools, and popping bubbles.

As well as being fun to use, the magic table is helping to increase physical activity and social engagement. It uses a light projector and therapeutic sounds to promote feelings of calm for people with dementia.

Octavia Carers at all seven of our extra care schemes have continued to provide practical and emotional support to residents since the start of the pandemic. As well as helping them keep in touch with friends and family through telephone and video calls, colleagues have also been paying special attention to supporting resident wellbeing, through socially distanced activities including arts and crafts, zoom yoga, and exercise bike sessions.

Octavia apprenticeship leads to career job



Octavia has a track record of providing good quality work-based training and apprenticeships to help young people build their skills and confidence in the world of work. Former Octavia apprentice Jada, 20, joined us as an apprentice youth worker last year after leaving college. Her time supporting our digital youth projects with Base@theReed was an opportunity to gain experience in her chosen career of youth work, while also making a positive difference to the lives of the other young people she worked with.

Jada completed her apprenticeship in November and was successful in securing a job as Youth Programmes Coordinator with a leading charity, starting an exciting new chapter in her life. She said her Octavia apprenticeship gave her the practical experience she needed to take the next step in her career journey.

Jada said: “My time at Octavia taught me how to be a great youth worker. I have received a lot of personal and professional development support, including training and coaching from my manager and colleagues. Throughout my apprenticeship, I felt appreciated in my role and my work was recognised as contributing something valuable to the bigger picture.”

For information about current work placement opportunities at Octavia, go to www.octaviafoundation.org.uk

How did we do?



Every year we produce a report to keep residents up to date with the work we have done over the last 12 months. It provides information about how well we have performed. It also shows how we have listened to residents and responded to your feedback to improve our services. You can view our 2019-20 Resident's Annual Report on our website at: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/residents-report-2020.

We send information updates to all residents through a variety of channels, including our regular newsletter. We want to ensure we are keeping in touch in ways that are convenient for you. If you would prefer to receive your Update newsletter by email instead of by post, please let us know by emailing us at update@octavia.org.uk.

Listening to residents

Last month we held two focus groups with residents to get their views on how we want to shape our services for the future. We talked to them about their experiences since the first lockdown to find out more about the services that are important to them. Residents told us how much they appreciate our caretakers and cleaning services. They also gave very positive feedback on our fast response to service requests, with many impressed by the seamless service they have received under the current restrictions.

Going forward, residents said they would like us to develop a community network to help ensure their vulnerable neighbours are supported and for us to ensure that resident safety remains at the forefront of the work we do. They also expressed a desire for us to provide more support for people in financial difficulty or those seeking employment. We've taken these views on board. They are feeding into our service planning, both to meet current needs related to Covid-19, and beyond.

Help us to improve our services



Our resident services forum, Your Voice, plays an important role in shaping our services and reviewing how we respond to feedback on our performance from residents. The group is made up of 14 residents and independent housing specialists and it reports directly to the Board.

We currently have a vacancy on the group and we are inviting residents to apply for the role.

Your Voice meets every two months between 6-8pm, plus other occasional meetings, and new members are fully supported into the role with all necessary training and equipment supplied. Meetings can be face-to-face but at the moment, because of Covid-19, they are being held via Zoom.

Keith has been an Octavia resident for over 30 years and is a member of Your Voice. This is what he has to say about why it's more important than ever for people to get involved: "It's important that residents of all ages and backgrounds are part of these conversations so that we are all represented. Your Voice is a brilliant opportunity to represent your neighbourhood and influence Octavia's services."

An application form with more information about the role and a free postage return envelope, is enclosed with this newsletter. If you would like to speak to us to find out more about this opportunity, call **020 8354 5500** and ask to speak to our Resident Involvement Manager or email be.involved@octavia.org.uk. The closing date for applications is 8 January 2021.

New grants available from the Better Lives Community Fund

The Octavia Better Lives Community Fund has been running for three years, helping small charities and voluntary groups provide vital community support to people living in some of the areas where we work. Last year's funding round helped provide various support for young people, including:

- Summer sports activities, mentorship and healthy living guidance for disadvantaged children
- Canal boat excursions for refugee children and their families
- Free play scheme places for children experiencing loneliness and isolation

Applications are now open to apply for grants from this year's fund and we are inviting charities and community groups in Westminster and Kensington boroughs to apply. The fund is available to groups based in Westminster and Kensington only and is aimed at organisations that are working with children and young people experiencing isolation and/ or from low income households.

For more information about the fund, eligibility, and how to apply, go to our website: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/betterlivesfund. Funding applications close on 1 January 2021.

Black Lives Matter

We are committed to being an anti-racist organisation and welcome discussion with residents about how we can ensure we are a truly inclusive landlord, where everyone feels their voice is heard, regardless of the background.

We want to increase our awareness and understanding about racism concerns among our residents to help us develop our services, and help London as a whole, to tackle the challenges of both racism and racial inequality. We want to hear from you to learn your first-hand experiences and start a dialogue about what you want to change for the better. If you would like to join this conversation, please share your experiences with us by emailing update@octavia.org.uk.

We are responding faster

We aim to provide a responsive and improving service. That's why from the beginning of December we have reduced the maximum amount of time we will take to respond to your emails to us from 10 working days to five. To find out more about our service standards, go to:

www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/feedback-and-general-information/service-standards

Consider a career with our care team



“Listening and seeing the person, not the illness” – that is what makes a good carer, according to Octavia Care Assistant, Patricia. Nominated for an award at the Great British Care Awards 2019, Patricia’s entry into the profession came later in life, after she found herself at a crossroads in her career. She left her job to care for her parents and quickly found that lending a helping hand and a listening ear came naturally to her. Keen to harness these compassionate qualities, she decided to pursue a career in dementia care.

“I started my journey in care work around 10 years ago,” said Patricia. “Prior to this I was a telephonist and receptionist at various hospitals in west London. When I hit my late 40s, I knew I needed a change and wanted to do something totally different. Looking after my parents full-time was really rewarding and the experience inspired me to look into caring professionally.”

Patricia is part of the award-winning Octavia care team that supports residents at our extra care schemes to live well, supporting their independence while providing the level of care they need. “I love chatting to them about anything and everything. It could be about the news, the past, or the present. It’s great to see them come to life when we are having a laugh or sharing stories and common interests.”

If you would like to know more about a career as a carer with Octavia, go to our website for more information www.octaviasupport.org.uk/careers.

Christmas and New Year contacts

Emily House – remains closed for the time being because of Covid-19.

Contact team – the Contact Centre will be closed from 2pm on 24 December. It will be open with a limited service on December 29, 30 and 31 (between 10am and 3pm).

Repairs – the repairs service will be operating the same hours as the Contact Centre over the holidays, with the out-of-hours, emergency only, repair service operating from 2pm on 24 December.

Floating support service - If you need to speak to a support officer, please call the Contact team.

Sheltered and housing for older people – If you need to speak to your scheme manager, please call either the scheme office or the Contact team, who will put you through to a member of the team.

Normal services resume on Monday 4 January.

Useful contact numbers

| organisation | contact number | organisation | contact number |
|---|--|------------------------|-----------------|
| Westminster Council Adult Social Care | 0207 641 2500, or text on 07944 521615 | CALM, UK | 0800 58 58 58 |
| Kensington and Chelsea Council Adult Services | 020 7361 3013 | Silver Line Helpline | 0800 4 70 80 90 |
| Age UK, Westminster | 020 3004 5610 | Mind Helpline | 0300 123 3393 |
| Age UK, Kensington & Chelsea | 020 8969 9105 | National Dementia Line | 0300 222 11 22 |
| Salvation Army, Westminster | 020 7233 0296 | SANeline | 0300 304 7000 |
| Salvation Army, Kensington and Chelsea | 020 7352 7557 | Citizen’s Advice | 0300 330 1174 |
| | | Samaritans | 116 123 |

Our performance

We check on our performance in all areas of our work in order to improve. We are doing well in a number of areas including completing repairs on time and managing rent arrears. How quickly we let properties was impacted by Covid-19 earlier in the year but we are now letting properties quickly and conducting virtual viewings safely.

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The average call answering time in our Contact Centre is slightly higher than the target due to technical adjustments to enable staff to work from home. You told us you value having your enquiry dealt with at the first point of contact. We are responding on average to over 75% of your enquiries correctly at first contact and achieved 80% last month. If we are not able to answer your call quickly, please leave us a recorded message. We will call you back and you will not lose your place in the queue. A summary of how we are doing in key areas is in the table below.

| Performance indicator | November 2020 | March 2021 target | Rating |
|---|---------------|-------------------|--------|
| Rent arrears as % of rent due (general needs) | 3.8% | 4.9% | 😊 |
| Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs) | 99.7% | 99.3% | 😊 |
| Standard voids – average re-let time in days (year to date) | 44 | 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 | 99.8% | 98% | 😊 |
| % responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time | 100% | 95% | 😊 |
| Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (Contact team) | 22 | 20 | 😐 |
| Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line) | 8 | 20 | 😊 |
| Average time to respond to complaints (in days) | 8 | 10 | 😊 |
| Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from our completed repairs survey) | 85% | 95% | 😐 |



Don't miss out on our annual £1,000 prize draw

Octavia holds a £1,000 prize draw for tenants who have a clear rent account at the end of the financial year. To be entered, you need to have a clear rent account by 4 April 2021. If you pay your rent monthly at the start of the month, please make your April payment one week early to ensure entry.

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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