

EDITION 42: SPRING 2021 - Up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

Putting residents at the centre of everything we do



I hope you are keeping safe and well

In March, we launched our bold new Corporate Strategy, which sets out our plans and objectives for the next three years.

Building on our social purpose, the new plan sets out our aim to be an exemplar as a landlord, in our neighbourhoods and as an employer, and our ambitions to lead the way in responding to the current issues that impact our local communities by putting residents at the centre of everything we do.

For over 150 years, Octavia has proudly stayed true to its purpose by providing people with good quality, affordable homes, support and opportunity. Our founder, Octavia Hill, recognised as we do today, that the context in which we work changes over time, bringing with it new challenges and fresh opportunities. By refreshing our vision and purpose, our new strategy will provide positive and lasting outcomes for residents and the wider communities we serve.

Continued over...

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
W www.octaviahousing.org.uk



Our Better Lives for All 2021-2024 strategy focuses on five key areas that will advance our new vision of vibrant communities, better lives for all.

- Tackle inequality – through quality homes and providing support and opportunity that enables communities to thrive
- Optimise our impact – through reliable and efficient services that meet the needs of people we work with
- People-centred – prioritising safety and wellbeing, and listening to residents
- Modern and engaging – using technology to enhance customer experience
- Build our legacy – investing in the future and providing affordable, energy-efficient homes

To find out more about it, please visit our website www.octaviahousing.org.uk/corporate-strategy. I'd welcome your thoughts about our strategy so if you have any feedback or questions, please email update@octavia.org.uk

Over the coming months, we will be engaging with residents about how we will be putting our strategy into action. If you would like to be involved with this, or if you want to know more about other ways in which you can help shape our services, please contact our Resident Involvement team at be.involved@octavia.org.uk to find out more.

Sandra Skeete, Chief Executive



Looking to kickstart your creative career?



KICKSTART SCHEME

The Government has set up a new programme, called Kickstart, that offers paid work placements to young people claiming Universal Credit, to help them launch their careers.

As a partner of the scheme, we are offering three six-month paid job placements as digital content creators with our Youth team. If you're aged between 16 to 24 years old and in receipt of benefits, this could be just what you need to start your career in the creative industry.

By joining Octavia you will have the opportunity to produce engaging material such as films, that will be promoted and shared through our external media channels. The visibility of working on such high profile projects could be just what you need to get you noticed and help you in your career.

So if you have a passion for digital arts, photography, technology or video production and want to learn from experts, go to our website to find out more about this exciting opportunity. www.octaviahousing.org.uk/kickstart

We are dedicated to helping residents find new employment and training. If you are seeking work, or in need of help and advice with training for something new, contact us and ask to speak to our Employment and Training team.



We are here to help



We know that many people have seen their income affected by the pandemic. If you are struggling to feed yourself or your family, we can help. We can make emergency referrals to a foodbank for people who need this and some foodbanks provide home deliveries, if there is a medical need or your household is isolating.

If you have lost your job and you cannot afford a needed replacement to a household item such as a cooker, we may also be able to help with getting you access to a grant to cover the cost. Any resident can apply for a grant if they do not have funds to replace an essential household item.

Please call us on **020 8354 5500** if you need our assistance, or if you are worried about meeting your rent payments. It can be hard to ask for help when you need it. Please be assured that all calls will be handled sensitively.



Need advice with benefits or managing money?

Struggling with money worries or need advice about benefits or budgeting? We can help with this too. We've got an expert Financial Inclusion team which is dedicated to helping residents access benefits they are entitled to.

If you want to speak to them urgently about any budgeting or benefits concerns, you can use our Financial Inclusion service by following these steps:

1. Call our Advice Line on 020 8354 5500 between 9.30 - 11.00am
2. We will log your details and arrange for someone to call you back
3. We will call you back the same day, usually within 15 minutes

If your enquiry is not urgent but you feel you could benefit from talking to us, you can book an appointment to speak to someone from the team by calling us Monday to Friday, 9.30am - 4.30pm.

We are also here to help with advice if you are concerned about paying your rent or service charge.

If you are in contact with an Income Account Manager to help you manage your rent and service charges, please be aware that we have made some changes in the team so you may be contacted by someone new. The service provided is unchanged. For all enquiries about this speak to the Contact team on **020 8354 5500**.



Thanks for sharing your views on our digital services



We held a Call Around Wednesday in March to speak to residents about our digital services and how you think they could be improved. Thank you to everyone who was able to speak to us.

Since Covid-19 restrictions still prevent us visiting residents at home, we've been carrying out these regular feedback events by phone instead. More than 30 Octavia colleagues called and spoke to 285 residents on the same day, to find out about how they use the Octavia website and the My Octavia resident app.

Nearly 75% of people said they use at least one Octavia online channel, though many said they prefer other methods such as phone and email to keep in touch. Some told us they find information on our website useful, though others said service information was not quick to find and they prefer the ease and convenience of our app. We will be using all this feedback, together with the results of our recent resident app survey, to help us plan developments to our digital services.

The My Octavia app is a great way for you to quickly check your rent statement, monitor progress on reported repairs and to contact us at a time convenient for you. More than 1,400 residents are now using the app and we are preparing to launch new features to improve it. To find out more about the app and how you can start using it, go to:

www.octaviahousing.org.uk/mobile-app

Listening to your feedback

In spite of the difficulties caused by the pandemic, residents have continued to get involved with us to give their views and feedback on our services.

Repairs Satisfaction - In a recent online focus group meeting on repairs satisfaction, residents told us they would like to see improvement in how we keep them updated with follow-up works when it hasn't been possible to finish a repair during a first visit. In response, we are reviewing the process for arranging follow-up appointments with residents, to ensure they are better informed at every stage.

Your Voice: Our main resident involvement group, Your Voice, has played a crucial role in ensuring residents are involved in developing our Environmental Sustainability Strategy. They also contributed to improving how we manage compensation for residents when services sometimes go wrong. Most recently, the group has been looking into how noise disturbance complaints are handled between neighbours, ensuring a consistency of service across different homes tenures.

For more information about Your Voice and how it works to ensure the voice of residents is heard, go to: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/be-involved/your-voice

Octavia shops are open



We had a great community response to the opening of our charity shops on April 12, in line with the lifting of Covid restrictions on non-essential shopping.

Beaming under their masks, members of the public couldn't contain their excitement as they returned to our 15 charity shops across central and west London. The joy was echoed by our staff and there was a real buzz in the air as we welcomed back our valued customers.

We've ensured that our shops can operate in a Covid-safe environment, with strict measures in place for the safety of customers, staff and volunteers - including sanitising stations, enhanced cleaning and protective equipment.

Funds raised from our shops go towards helping local people of all ages and backgrounds, demonstrating our vision to bring community and sustainable fashion together for the common good.

Andrew Adair, Head of Retail at Octavia, said:

"Octavia charity shops raise vital funds that help us reach hundreds of people every year with support and life-enhancing opportunities. Our shops rely on the generosity of local people so please do consider supporting them by shopping, donating or volunteering with us."

Please get in touch if you are interested in finding out more about volunteering at one of our shops.

All donations are welcome and can be dropped off during the opening hours of, Wednesday – Saturday, 10am-5.30pm, and Sundays from 11am-4.30pm. You can find Octavia shops near you on our website, www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/charity_shops

Don't suffer in silence - if you are in an abusive relationship we can help

Domestic abuse can be one of the most difficult types of situations to talk about and to escape from. Domestic abuse is not always physical violence. It can be sexual, financial, psychological, or emotional abuse, and includes:

- Controlling behaviours – designed to dominate another person, or make them dependent on the abuser by isolating them from sources of support. Examples of this include depriving someone of their independence and means of escape, or regulating their everyday behaviour.
- Coercive behaviour – such as assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation or other abuse used to harm, punish or frighten someone.

Domestic abuse is a criminal offence and it can happen to anyone. It affects women and men and can occur between current or former intimate partners, or family members. If you are suffering domestic abuse, it can be difficult to recognise when a relationship has become abusive. It can also be difficult for someone who is being abused to realise what's happening to them and what they can do about it.



Supporting residents experiencing domestic abuse is a priority for Octavia. We want those experiencing this to know they can approach us, talk to us, and be listened to. We work jointly with specialist, confidential services to help to keep those being abused safe by offering emotional and practical support.

If you, or someone you know, is suffering domestic abuse you can contact us on **020 8354 5500** and we will help you.

For more information about domestic abuse and how to report it, see our website: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/domestic-abuse

Base@ theReed is back



Our digital youth club, Base@ theReed, returns to face-to-face events from 1 June, in time for the school half term. We will be following government guidelines to ensure everyone's safety and all activities will be delivered in a Covid-secure environment. Alongside this, we are also continuing our popular remote sessions on Zoom.

Planned activities include workshops/projects in video game design, content creation, and online gaming and watch party sessions.

From 26 July to 27 August, Base will be providing a blended summer programme of remote and face-to-face activities and trips. All activities are free to attend but they do require pre-registration. Contact Conor at conor.lynch@octaviafoundation.org.uk or visit the website, www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/base, for further details and to register.



Keeping our repairs on track

The last year has been difficult for keeping on top of repairs to homes, as we have all had to do things differently and under challenging restrictions.

Our repairs service had to adapt to meet this challenge, by dealing with urgent repairs and other works while also keeping to the Covid-19 safety guidelines. Our partner contractors, Mears and Village Heating, have been really supportive in ensuring that emergency and urgent repairs have been dealt with within timescales. They have also continued with planned routine works, where safety and available resources have allowed.

In recent weeks, to help with the re-opening of our charity shops, Mears colleagues donned their overalls and helped provide a welcome facelift for some of our stores. They carried out painting and repair work to three of our shops – Askew Road, High Street Ealing and Brompton Road. Even better, they carried out this work as part of their social value programme so there was no charge to Octavia. We are very grateful for the support they have given us through this uncertain time.



Permission to install laminate flooring

We want all residents to be comfortable in their homes and welcome people changing the décor for a freshen-up, or to suit their style and taste. However when it comes to changing the flooring, there are important considerations to bear in mind about how this might impact neighbours. We would like to remind residents that if you want to install wood or laminate flooring in your home, then you must get written permission from us first.

This is because some of our homes are unsuitable for this kind of flooring as it can create unintended noise and vibrational transference between flats. If you are thinking of installing wood or laminate flooring, speak to your Resident Service Officer about it first. Even if this is not suitable for your home, they can advise on many other alternatives to carpet that will not disturb your neighbours.



Make your voice heard



Are you aware that completing the national census helps councils receive a fair share of funding from central government? How? The greater the number of residents who complete the survey, the better councils are able to plan for future local services to meet communities' needs.

The ONS is still accepting paper returns of the census until early June. The once-in-a-decade survey presents an opportunity that creates a clearer picture of where people live so don't miss out.

Only by getting everyone counted can we ensure their needs will be represented in future service planning. Find out more at <https://census.gov.uk/>



New website to celebrate young talent



'Birth of Cool' is Octavia's Lottery funded programme that provided opportunities for young people to gain skills and confidence in digital media, through working alongside celebrated industry professionals.

In celebration of London Fashion Week in March, with our help the young people involved launched a new website to mark the end of the project and to exhibit their creative work.

Birth of Cool produced a series of online and offline installations, all inspired by the revolutionary youth culture of the Kings Road from the 1960s through to the 1980s. The programme celebrated how the area became a rebellious, creative fashion hub, setting a trend which influenced a generation as it spread around the world.

You can take a look at the amazing talent of the young people involved in Birth of Cool by visiting their showcase website: www.birthofcool.org



Helping residents move to a more suitable home

If you feel you could benefit from living in a larger or smaller home, we may be able to help. We have a transfer list for residents living in assured or secure tenancies which is designed to help families who need to move because of overcrowded living or medical need. There are also options to mutually exchange your home with a tenant from another housing association, if both tenants agree to the swap.

We believe that access to good, suitable homes is important to ensure all of our residents have equal opportunity to live well. Our Lettings team is proactive with helping families living in overcrowded homes through identifying better suited internal mutual exchange matches and supporting residents through the process. Call us on **020 8354 5500** to find out more.



Extra support for vulnerable residents continues

Over the last year, we've been keeping in touch with vulnerable residents to offer them extra support. Recently we've been keeping in contact by phone every month.

Residents have found our calls and help very reassuring. Fortunately, most people have been getting all the help they need from family, friends or neighbours, but we have provided some extra assistance with things like shopping to some people who are unable to leave their home.

We will continue to provide this support until the social restrictions of the pandemic are lifted. Please help us by continuing to check on vulnerable neighbours, where it is safe to do so, to offer them support. If you have concerns about anyone who might need our help, please let us know by calling the Contact team on **020 8354 5500**.

Our performance

We check on our performance in all areas of our work in order to improve. A summary of our performance for the year April 2020 to March 2021 is in the table below. In spite of the considerable challenges for all of us during the year due to Covid-19, we are pleased to say that a good performance has been maintained across our key services. We have been committed to ensuring services are delivered smoothly and with everyone's safety in mind.

We are doing well in a number of areas, including completing emergency and urgent repairs on time and keeping any backlog from lockdowns to a minimum, managing rent arrears to its lowest level for over two decades, and responding to reports of anti-social behaviour quickly.

How quickly we re-let empty properties was impacted by Covid-19 between April and June 2020 but we have met our target each month since July 2020. Our Contact team call answering speed was slightly out of target for the year. This is mainly due to problems earlier in the year, as we had to rapidly adapt our call centre technology to enable everyone to work remotely.

Performance indicator	March 2021	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % of rent due (general needs)	3.76%	4.9%	😊
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	100.2%	99.3%	😊
Standard voids – average re-let time in days (year to date)	35	30	😞
% of emergency repairs completed within target time	100%	99%	😊
% of urgent repairs completed within target time	99.9%	99%	😊
% of routine repairs completed within target time*	95.8%	98%	😐
% gas safety checks completed	100%	100%	😊
% fire risk assessments completed	100%	100%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (Contact team)	26	20	😞
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	9	20	😊
Average time to respond to complaints (in days)	8	10	😊
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from our completed repairs survey)	87%	95%	😐

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

Contacting us

Our office at Emily House remains closed because of the pandemic. Please continue to contact us by calling the Contact Team on 020 8354 5500 or through our website or resident app.

Please continue to report all repairs in the usual way.

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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