

OCTAVIA 



# Listening to residents

Annual Report  
2020-2021



# A message from Sandra Skeete

## Octavia Chief Executive

Octavia provides homes, support and care to thousands of people in central and west London. We strive to be an exemplar in providing good quality affordable homes to make sure that people on low incomes can continue to live in some of the most expensive parts of the capital. We aim to support diverse neighbourhoods to help not just the people we house, but wider communities to live well, to remain independent, to make connections and to thrive.

Every year we set targets for our work, to make sure that we are delivering services that meet our values of being responsive, reliable, respectful and resourceful. Throughout everything we do lies one core belief: that mixed communities are stronger communities, and that everyone deserves the same chances in life.



## Our work in 2020/21 was focused on:

- Maintaining and developing good homes.
- Supporting people and providing opportunities for them to lead better lives.
- Enabling people to stay connected with their community and live independently.

This report summarises our work in 2020/21. It sets out how we performed and how you, the people who live in our homes, or receive care or community support from us, have worked with us to improve and shape services.

Much of this year's work was focused on helping people most seriously impacted by the Covid pandemic. Though face-to-face contact was severely restricted, we continued to stay connected via telephone and online technology. We adapted our services to provide more welfare support and benefit advice to people who experienced a loss in income. We also stepped in to support older and vulnerable residents isolated by the lockdown, to ensure they were getting the support they needed.

As we recover from the disruption of the pandemic, more than ever we intend to listen to residents, to involve you in improving our services and putting you at the heart of everything we do.



# Your experience of our services

Our last resident survey in April 2020\*, demonstrated that 82% of you were happy with the services you received and 87% were happy with your neighbourhood as a place to live.

\*From resident satisfaction survey – compares our performance against other social landlords in London

	% satisfied 2020	% satisfied 2017	London housing provider comparison
Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by Octavia?	82%	83%	Top quartile
How satisfied are you with the overall quality of your home?	81%	84%	Top quartile
Thinking specifically about the building you live in, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Octavia provides a home that is safe and secure?	81%	Not asked	No comparative data available
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Octavia is easy to deal with?	79%	Not asked	No comparative data available
How satisfied are you with your neighbourhood as a place to live?	87%	88%	Top quartile
How satisfied are you that your rent provides value for money?	82%	86%	Top quartile
How satisfied are you that your service charges provide value for money?	60%	59%	No comparative data available*
Generally, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Octavia deals with repairs and maintenance?	76%	77%	Top quartile
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Octavia gives you the opportunity to make your views known?	74%	Not asked	No comparative data available
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that Octavia listens to your views and acts upon them?	70%	69%	Top quartile

\*Insufficient sample size declared by HouseMark  
Overall these are good results but satisfaction with service charges is an area we are working hard to improve.



# Our performance at a glance

We performed well overall in our targets for the year. Rent arrears were reduced to 3.8%, our lowest amount in the last 20 years. However, not being able to let homes from April to June 2020 due to Covid restrictions, meant our average re-let time was 35 days and higher than our usual performance.

## Performance indicator

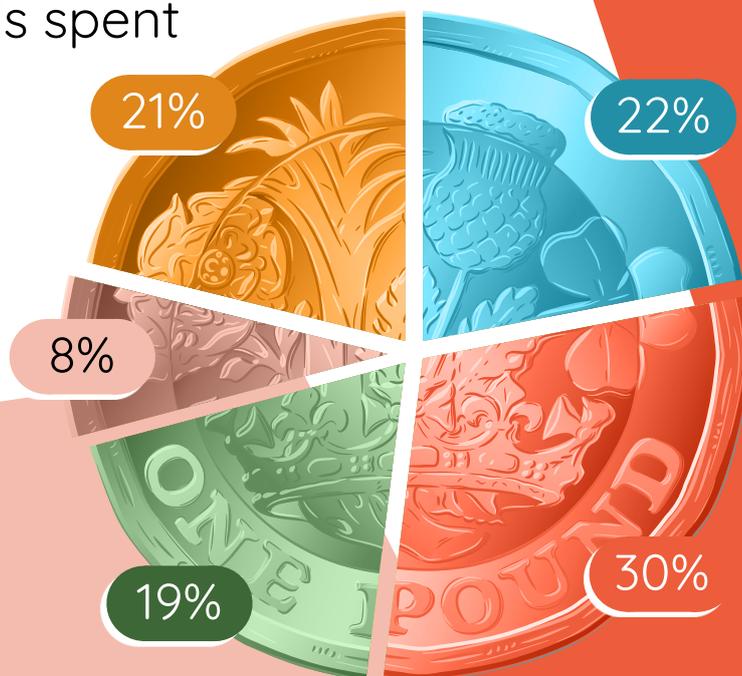
Performance indicator	2020/21	2019/20	London housing provider comparison
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	3.8%	4.1%	Upper median
Rent collection as % of rent due	100.6%	99.8%	Upper median
Empty homes loss as % of rent due	0.5%	0.4%	Top quartile
Average empty homes standard re-let time (in days)	35	N/A	N/A
Number of ASB cases per 1,000 properties	10	12	Top quartile
% residents satisfied with last repair	87%	95%	Upper median
% properties with valid landlord gas safety certificates	100%	100%	Top quartile
% fire risk assessments completed	100%	100%	No data available
Average call answering in seconds	14	15	Top quartile
Average time to respond to a complaint (in days)	8	9	Top quartile

# How social housing rent was spent

We aim to provide value for money in the services we provide to residents. In 2020/21, 82% of people asked said they were satisfied that their rent was value for money.

## How every pound is spent

- ▶ Homes management
- ▶ Homes services (service charges)
- ▶ Routine maintenance
- ▶ Planned maintenance
- ▶ Homes depreciation\* allocation



Total money spent in the year on management, services, maintenance and depreciation across general needs, leasehold, intermediate rent and extra care and supported housing was £34.4 million.

## Paying your Rent

We are really proud to report that as a result of work that has been done alongside residents, our rent arrears (the money that people owe on rent accounts), is the lowest it has been for 20 years at 3.30% across all the different types of housing that we provide. By providing a more rounded financial service directly, we have been able to work with residents to create realistic and practical payment plans. In challenging times, this has given vital security for residents and their families.

\*Depreciation is an accounting term used to note that the value of properties reduces over time (i.e wear and tear)

# Prioritising safety

It is always our top priority but this year the safety of residents, their neighbours, our staff and contractors was even more at the forefront of our work as much of our service needed to be delivered remotely.

We used new software to make it possible to securely run our contact team and repair call centres away from our offices. Despite the disruption, we took 37,000 resident calls and overall call answering targets were met.

Keeping homes safe and well-maintained during the enforced restrictions of the pandemic presented a considerable challenge for us and our contractors. Our caretaking teams worked especially hard to keep buildings as Covid-safe as possible through extra cleaning, use of PPE and other safety measures. Thank you to all residents who also followed the Government safety advice in and around your homes.

At our Call Around Wednesday (previously Walkabout Wednesday) on 15 July 2020, we asked residents for feedback on our Covid response. **81% of residents we spoke to were satisfied** with the cleaning on their scheme, with many comments praising individual caretakers and the good job they were doing under the difficult circumstances.



The safety of your homes is our absolute priority. Working with residents, we completed 100% of gas safety checks and fire risk assessments at the end of March 2021. There were some outstanding actions from these assessments at the end of March 2021 and all of these were scheduled for completion and being closely monitored.

As with many other housing associations, we continued to carry out fire safety works to some of our homes to ensure they meet evolving changes to fire safety legislation and building regulations. We are supporting residents of the homes affected and keeping them informed and regularly updated, to minimise as much as possible any disruption caused as we plan and carry out these essential works.

All emergency and urgent works were completed within target times throughout the year. Due to Covid, we had to reduce our planned works programme considerably, but we were still able to:

- Install 160 new boilers
- Provide external wall insulation works to 124 homes
- Replace windows to 54 homes.

Lockdown restrictions hampered repairs performance which impacted resident satisfaction. However, our performance was in the upper median which compares well with other housing associations.

Our kitchen and bathroom replacement programme had to be put on hold in March 2020. We are pleased to say this work has now restarted and we are working to get back on schedule following the lifting of Covid restrictions.

“What I like most is the interaction with residents. I also like helping residents with different issues. Residents are always really grateful. Not just for the cleaning services they receive, but for the help and support we provide as caretakers. I’ve received chocolates and flowers before after helping them out. They know they can count on me and that’s a good feeling.”

Octavia caretaker, Maria



# Community support

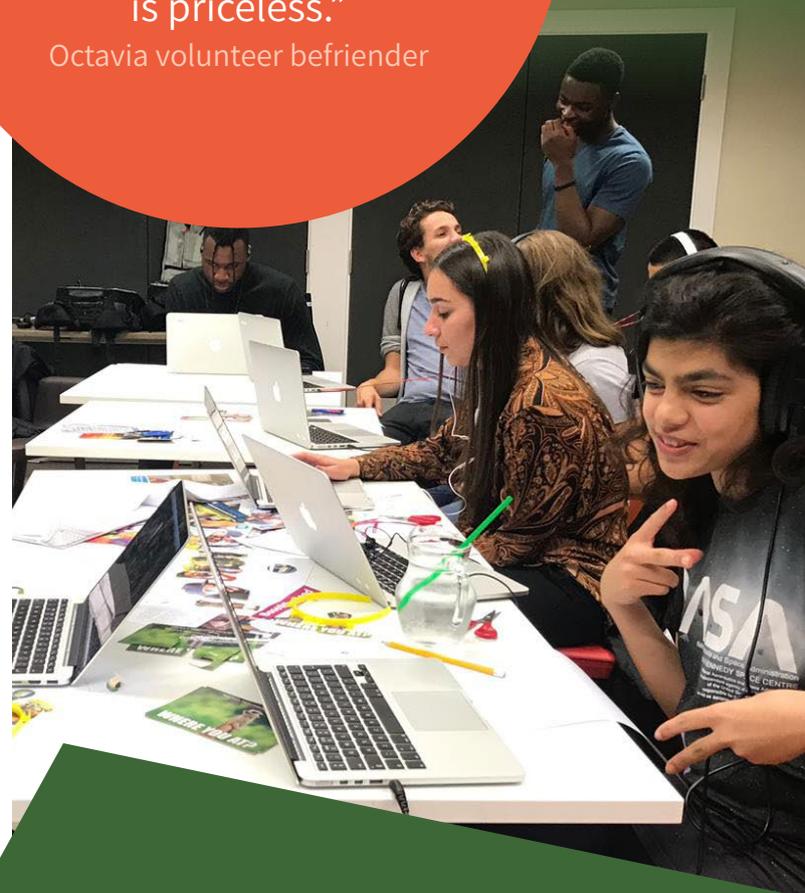
During both lockdown periods we made telephone contact with residents who might be in need of additional support and provided assistance to 246 people through meal deliveries, food shopping and help with collecting prescriptions.

We kept in regular telephone contact with all residents over 70 years old to offer assistance and welfare support. We are very grateful to corporate partners Goodman Masson and Lexis Nexis RSG volunteers for helping us with this.

Our befriending service for residents and other isolated people in the community moved to a telephone service and alongside our other outreach services and activity programme combined, we were able to help total of 878 people.

“My time is the most valuable thing I can offer. To spend it with nice and interesting people while helping people is priceless.”

Octavia volunteer befriender



“In the current climate, many older people are more physically isolated than ever. The barriers for contact are high and feelings of loneliness have intensified. Joan [my befriender] often says how much she appreciates and enjoys our calls and that proves to me how essential this service is.”

Octavia volunteer befriender,  
Suzanne

Our digital youth projects went online too, providing hours of creative activity for younger people. More than 130 young people were engaged with these projects.

One project, entitled Birth of Cool, was part of our National Lottery Heritage Fund. For this, the young people produced a series of exhibits, including a film documentary featuring the cultural and fashion history of the Kings Road in Chelsea. The film was shortlisted for industry awards.

Octavia’s community projects provided a lifeline for people of all ages who felt cut off from the world around them by the pandemic. We are very grateful to our 300 volunteers, especially volunteers who joined us during the pandemic, for helping us to deliver these projects.



## Providing vital care

Looking after older and more vulnerable people, who were at risk of experiencing extreme isolation during the pandemic, was an absolute priority throughout the year.



### Performance highlights:

- All 7 extra care schemes rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- 94% satisfaction with our Care and Support services
- 179 people received 3,369 hours of care per week
- 246 people supported through our dedicated Covid community response across support and care services
- 878 people took part in outreach, befriending and activities

“Whenever I hear the name Octavia, it brings sunshine into my life. Three of the best times in my life have been graduating with my nursing degree, receiving Maundy money from the Queen for my charity work, being introduced to the Octavia Outreach service.”

Octavia outreach  
service user

Across our seven extra care schemes, colleagues were quick to meet the challenge of the emergency, helping to keep residents safe and providing additional wellbeing support during what was a difficult time for many. Older residents were asked to shield in line with rules set out by the Government but we used technology to help keep people in contact with their family and friends and we continued a full series of socially distanced activities to keep people active.

All our extra care schemes are rated ‘Good’ by the Government assessor of care services and we received a 94% satisfaction rating directly from people living in the schemes or receiving other care services.





“Thank you so much,  
I really appreciate it. You  
have really helped me in  
need and I won’t forget that.”

Hammersmith and Fulham resident  
who was recovering from illness and  
was supported to replace bedroom  
furniture after a flood  
at her home.

## Helping people in financial difficulty

Our purpose is to deliver equality through homes, support and opportunity. The financial impact of the pandemic has been felt disproportionately, with many of those most severely affected already at a disadvantage before the health crisis began.

To meet this unprecedented need, we helped people whose income had been affected by accessing benefits and welfare support or assisting people to find new jobs and training.

We helped 615 people through food banks or food parcels and secured grants for 96 people on low incomes to purchase essential household items such as fridges, cookers or computer equipment for education, training or work. We also provided 364 older or disabled people with home handyman and gardening visits.

“Thank you so much.  
I just did not know which  
way to turn after losing my  
job due to Covid. Octavia  
really helped me so much.”

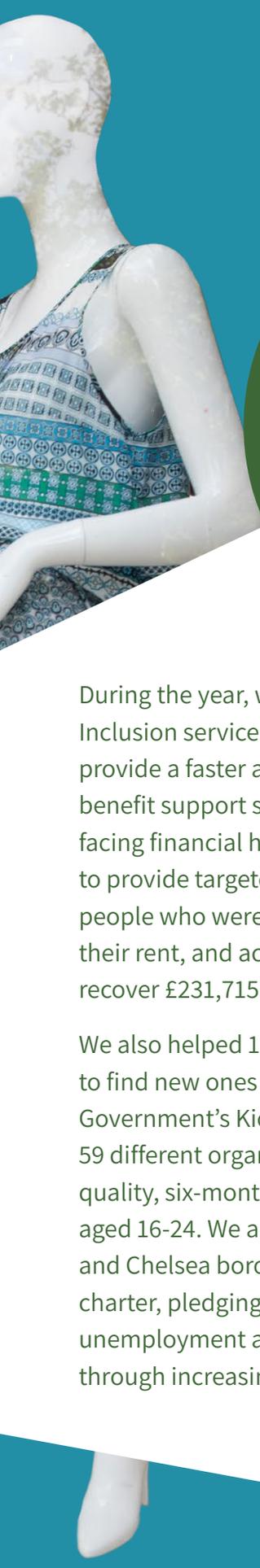
Westminster resident, who lost their  
job during the pandemic.

“I am pleased to  
say that Roy, the gardener,  
came today and did his usual  
brilliant job, and generally made  
the garden look cared for and  
inviting. Hopefully improvements  
in the weather will let us sit  
outside and enjoy it soon.  
Thank you again.”

Older resident couple  
living in Westminster.



We reached more than  
**3,200 people**  
through welfare  
assistance, outreach  
and community  
projects.



“Octavia’s employment service has helped to broaden my horizons and re-evaluate what I want from the next stage of my career. Now that I’m back in stable employment and I am able to revisit my longer-term search, it’s reassuring to know that Octavia will be there with me every step of the way.”

Octavia resident Sireh, who we supported to achieve a new job during the pandemic.

During the year, we brought our Financial Inclusion service in-house so that we could provide a faster and more comprehensive benefit support service to residents facing financial hardship. This enabled us to provide targeted help to more than 250 people who were at risk of not being able to pay their rent, and across the year we were able to recover £231,715 for residents.

We also helped 103 people who had lost their jobs to find new ones or access training. We joined the Government’s Kickstart Scheme, a collection of 59 different organisations to create three high-quality, six-month placements for young people aged 16-24. We also signed up with Kensington and Chelsea borough’s ‘Pathways to Work’ charter, pledging to work in partnership to tackle unemployment among social housing residents, through increasing employability and opportunity.



# Building more affordable homes

Covid stopped house-building across the country so we were unable to build as many new homes as we wanted this year but we did develop 20 new homes for Affordable and Intermediate Rent in Hammersmith and Westminster, and, by the end of March 2021, 325 new homes were in development, 60% of them for Affordable Rent.

During the year we were proud to launch two Housing First partnerships. We provided two homes to London charity Solace Women's Aid and Standing Together, who provide vital support to women fleeing domestic abuse. We also partnered with St Mungo's, providing two homes directly to street homeless people in Westminster. Both organisations provide intensive, wrap-around support services from specialist teams to make these tenancies successful, and life-changing for the recipients.

“This flat just feels like a dream. I never imagined I would get housed in this area. I feel so lucky.”

Octavia resident housed through our partnership with Solace and Standing Together.



# Listening to residents

We were unable to hold face-to-face events during the year but we managed to reach more people than in previous years through making it easier for you to connect with us remotely by telephone and online.

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback and insight about our services and how you want them to improve. We value your views and this year it has been more important than ever that you were able to be satisfied with the standard of our services.

We also spoke by phone to 507 residents in two 'Call Around' events, to get feedback on our Covid response, as well as how residents would like us to develop our digital services. One response to this has been to increase services available through My Octavia, our resident app, to include reporting repairs. Residents were also involved with checking the quality of our Customer Contact team and repairs service and there was further involvement through 25 local service feedback events.



Our strategic resident group, Your Voice, which reports to our Group Services Committee, played an important role in representing all residents through assessing our service and safety performance. The group continued to meet online throughout the year and contributed to reviews of our complaints policy, compensation policy, assignment and succession policy, as well as helping to develop our new environmental sustainability strategy.

Between January and April 2021, we held a number of local meetings with homeowners to get their feedback on our services. In response to listening to concerns, we are working to improve how we communicate over service charges to provide more clarity about how these charges are spent. We are also focusing on improving our processes for planned works and improvements to homes, and on managing and monitoring services provided by third party managing agents.

Involving residents and ensuring their views are listened to is at the heart of the charter of rights in the Social Housing White Paper. As we built back from a challenging year, we held resident focus groups to help us learn from the experience and improve services going forward, so they can better meet your needs.



We've updated our resident app  
'My Octavia'  
so you can now use it to report a repair – see  
[www.octaviahousing.org.uk/MyOctavia](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/MyOctavia)

# How we responded to your feedback

**You Said:** Our compensation policy is unclear about the amount of time allowed to make a claim.

**We Did:** Updated our compensation policy, to make it clear that people have 28 days following the completion of an event to make a claim.



**You Said:** We like the App, but it lacks a genuine repairs reporting function.

**We Did:** Updated the app so that as of June 2021, you can use it to report a repair.

**You Said:** Caretaking services were good during the lockdown, however lots of dumped rubbish was building up in our schemes.

**We Did:** Carried out extra monitoring and clearances in areas prone to rubbish dumping.



**You Said:** Some vulnerable residents with lower-level needs are not getting the support they need from Octavia.

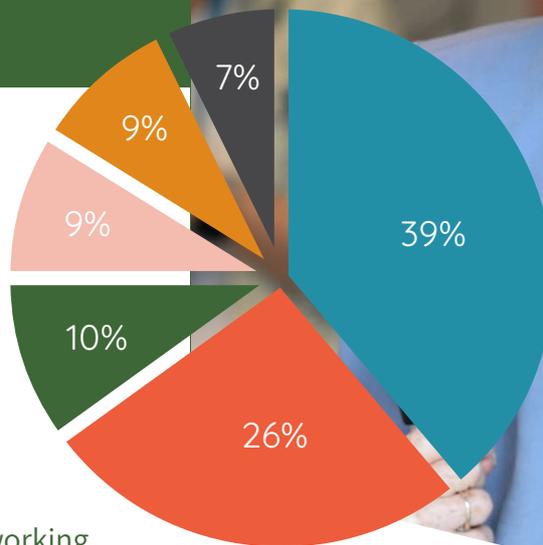
**We Did:** Assigned a Resident Services Officer to all residents with lower-level support needs to ensure we keep in regular contact.



# Dealing with complaints

In 2020/21, we received 106 formal complaints (nine fewer than in 2019/20) and the complaints were about:

- Repairs
- Housing management (incl. ASB)
- Service charges
- Planned works
- Communal services
- Other



The average response time was eight working days, which is within our service standard of 10 working days. Of these, 89% were resolved by our service managers, 12 were escalated to our independent complaints panel and two of these complaints were upheld.

The Housing Ombudsman reviewed eight, and in one case found maladministration on grounds of the delays to completing a repair and the level of compensation offered. We have taken the learning from this finding very seriously. We have reviewed the case and revised our Compensation Policy to reflect this finding and improve our performance in this area.

We carry out regular case reviews on complaints including with our contractors to learn from your feedback. Other changes made from complaints learning include:

- all empty homes inspections are now checked by and signed off by our Building Inspector before the home is re-let
- we reviewed processes to ensure contractors know when a new home is in defects period, and
- we will soon introduce a central complaints role to oversee the quality of all our responses to complaints.

In 2020-21 the Housing Ombudsman published a new Code for Complaint Handling. We carried out an assessment against the Code to confirm our service is fully compliant with the new Code. The assessment is available on our website.



# Building on Octavia's legacy

We know that access to affordable housing is crucial to improve quality of life and equality of opportunity. We believe people should be empowered, not excluded, by where they live.

In response to the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020, we set out our intention to become an anti-racist organisation through a number of commitments to tackle racism, inequality and social injustice in our communities. These included understanding any differences in how our services are delivered and received and ensuring all residents are able to access our services equally.

In April 2021, we launched a new three-year strategy, 'Better lives for all', to focus on delivering greater equality through homes, support and opportunity, putting residents at the heart of everything we do.

We want to provide exemplary services. We also want to champion equality and inclusion through our work, so we can continue to build a lasting legacy for future generations for the common good.



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