

EDITION 44: SPRING 2022 – News for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

Putting residents at the centre of everything we do



Supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis

In March, you will have received your new rent booklet, providing details of this year's rent increase. We are committed to ensuring our homes remain affordable so increasing rents is never an easy decision, especially at a time when we know the cost of living is rising for all our residents.

We are facing significantly higher costs in delivering our service to you as we:

- invest in homes so they are easier to keep warm and cheaper to heat
- meet commitments to tackle climate change
- maintain and improve our existing properties
- ensure all our homes comply with evolving building safety requirements

But we know it is a tough time financially for many of you, as household budgets are being squeezed more now than at any point in recent years.

Rising heating bills, together with increasing tax contributions and the higher cost of living, is hitting residents across our communities hard and making life more challenging financially for everyone.

In this edition of our newsletter, we have included some information on how to improve your finances and economise on the cost of your heating and electricity bills. There is also information on where you can obtain free advice on rent, service charges, benefits, budgeting, and other money matters.

If you are worried about getting into arrears or losing your home, or you're struggling to pay your essential household bills, like gas and electricity and need support, please do not delay in contacting us. We want to support you and have expertise that can help.

Sandra Skeete, Octavia Chief Executive

Struggling to pay your bills? We are here to help

With the ending of the extra financial support put in place by the Government during the covid pandemic, and a number of household bills rising, some residents are facing a reduced budget and worrying about how to make difficult choices, like paying for food or going without heating and hot water.

You may be impacted by:

- rent and service charge increases
- increases in food prices
- energy price rises
- National Insurance contributions increasing by 1.25%

If you have been affected by these changes and are struggling to pay your essential bills, we can provide help and advice about:

- what to do if your income is reduced or you become unemployed
- making new benefit claims and challenging benefit decisions
- paying essential bills or buying food
- being worried about getting into rent arrears or at risk of losing your home

We reached out to more than 230 residents in December to offer our help in the face of rising energy bills. As a result, we were able to refer 96 residents to our energy advice partner, Green Doctors, to help make their homes warmer.

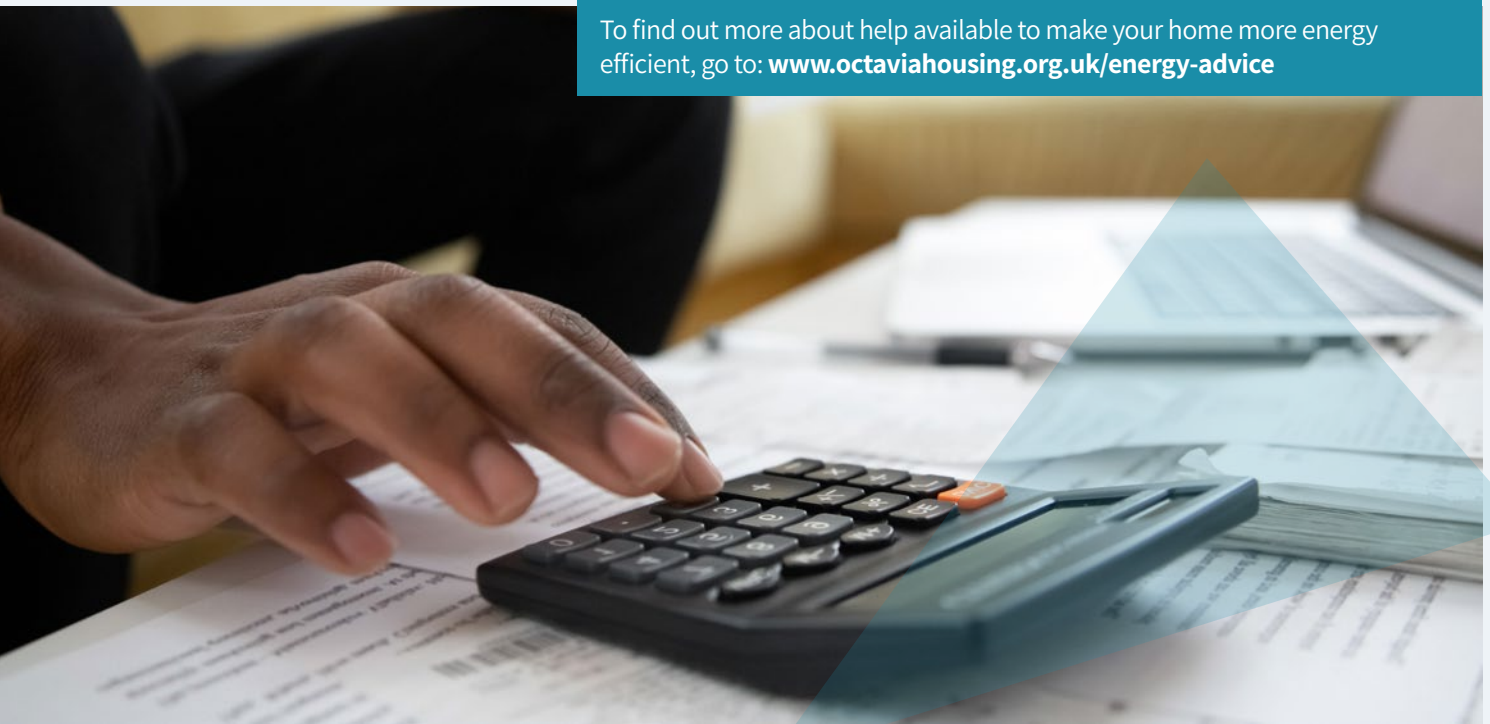
We were also able to help 94 residents with managing household costs through putting them in touch with our Financial Inclusion team.

We know this is a challenging time for many of you and that sometimes you may need extra support with essentials such as food. We partner with foodbanks across London which we can refer people to if they need it. If you need help with getting food, get in touch with us to talk to us in confidence about accessing support locally.

Please don't delay in contacting us if you are struggling or worried about managing your essential bills - we are here to help. Call us on **020 8534 5500**.

There is more information about our Financial Inclusion service on our website at: **www.octaviahousing.org.uk/financial-support**

To find out more about help available to make your home more energy efficient, go to: **www.octaviahousing.org.uk/energy-advice**



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

Looking for a new job?

Octavia's Employment Service helps out-of-work residents find a way back into the workplace. It also supports residents who are in work but want to increase their income or change their career.

We have helped many residents who lost work because of the pandemic with finding new employment through support with CV writing, interview technique and job searching. If you are looking to get into paid employment, or if you are seeking a higher paid job, we may be able to help you.



Our Employment Service is available to all residents. For more information, please contact Kyrsha on **07931 170771** or email, kyrsha.haynes@octaviafoundation.org.uk

Octavia care and support receives RBKC Mayor's award

We are delighted that our Care, Support and Communities teams have won an award from the Mayor of Kensington and Chelsea for their outstanding work in supporting older and vulnerable people during the covid-19 pandemic.

While most of us were isolating at home during this time, Octavia's Care team based at our community hub, The Reed in North Kensington, were out and about every day, providing vital support to local people in a number of ways.

This included hand delivering food vouchers, preparing and delivering food parcels, shopping for residents who were shielding, visiting members of the Kensington Day Centre and vulnerable residents to provide social contact and emotional support, and working with local charity partners to distribute meals.

Colleagues in Octavia's Communities team also helped out by arranging telephone befriending for isolated people, carrying out wellbeing phone calls and issuing emergency food parcels and food vouchers (often outside of their working hours).

Commenting on the award, the Mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Councillor Gerard Hargreaves, said: "Mayor's Awards are given to recognise the people and organisations who serve our community and help make Kensington and Chelsea a great place to live, work and learn. On behalf of the whole borough, I thank Octavia's Care and Communities teams for their amazing contribution."



Have you got it covered?

As your home provider, we do not insure your furniture, belongings, and other personal items within your home against theft, fire, vandalism, burst pipes and other household risks.

We recommend that you take out your own personal contents insurance to cover this kind of potential damage to your home.

We have teamed up with a company, My Home Insurance Scheme, which specialises in providing home contents insurance cover for people living in social housing. Their policies insure against loss or damage for events such as, fire, theft or escape of water. The cover can include belongings such as furniture, TVs, clothing, carpets, lost or stolen keys, electrical items, and general household goods.



The scheme is backed by the National Housing Federation. You can contact My Home Insurance through their website www.thistlemyhome.co.uk or by calling them on **0345 450 7288**. Full details of the policy cover and exclusions are available on request.

Making sure your voice is heard

We are working with our resident consultation group, Your Voice, and other residents to look at ways to improve how we engage with you and how we can involve you more in designing our services.

This work is helping us find out more about the experience residents have of our services, and how you can help us to improve. We are collecting this consultation feedback and will use it to inform a fresh resident involvement approach for Octavia.

The consultation is due to be completed over summer and we will update you on the review findings.



Your Voice focus

Our resident group Your Voice has also been busy over the last few weeks ensuring your interests are represented in our policy and service reviews. The group has provided input into ways to improve our complaints process, as well as helping us with assessing resident feedback on the My Octavia App. They have also made an important contribution to a government consultation over proposed changes to the way housing organisations demonstrate resident satisfaction.

If you have an issue that you would like Your Voice to look into, please contact them at: be.involved@octavia.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman review of complaints

The Housing Ombudsman has published its first annual review of complaints and conducted a review of their Complaint Handling Code one year after it took effect.

They have made some changes to the Code to strengthen and support positive complaint handling across the sector. Landlords have until October 2022 to be compliant with the Code.

We welcome and support the changes set out in the Code and have already started work to ensure we align with its new expectations. The review of our complaints policy and procedure is being carried out with the involvement of residents.

You can find more information on the ombudsman's website, www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk



We've been missing you

Throughout the covid pandemic we met with residents online to ensure we continued to get your views and feedback on our services. Now that the weather is improving and covid restrictions are lifted, we are planning to hold regular face-to-face meetings with you again.

We'll let you know when we are coming to your area. We look forward to meeting many of you again soon.

Octavia charity fund to support even more local people

The Octavia Better Lives Community Fund (BLCF) is providing £100,000 in grants this year to local charities and voluntary groups, to fund work with children and young people living in Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.

These grants support a wide range of organisations that work with children and young people experiencing isolation or from low-income households. The fund is administered by the Octavia Foundation, on behalf of Octavia.

The BLCF supported nearly 900 young people last year and it looks set to reach upwards of 1,500 this year. The grants make a huge difference to the amount of support local charities and voluntary groups are able to provide.

For one BLCF recipient, The Avenues Youth Project, it helped purchase a minibus to provide safe transport for young people to and from the club and on trips. The bus takes young people home after evening club sessions and is used for The Avenues' football team, and for group excursions.

A spokesman from the charity said: "We wanted young people to feel safe and respected whenever they are at the club or with us as an organisation. The safety this bus provides contributes enormously to us achieving this outcome for the young people of our community."

For more about Octavia Foundation's Better Lives Community Fund, go to www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/BLCF



Get booked for Base digital youth club this summer

We will be running our annual Base summer programme at The Reed over the summer holidays. The free to attend events start on **Monday 25 July and run until Friday 26 August.**

We've got an exciting programme of fun and innovative arts and digital media based activities, incorporating music, photography, film, animation, art and design and video games. It's a great opportunity to meet new people and get creative in a learning environment, using industry standard equipment.



The summer programme also includes day trips in London every week.

The activities are suitable for young people aged 10-16 and are free

to attend (Though registration is required and sign up is first come, first served). A meal is provided with every activity taking place at The Reed.



Contact Conor Lynch for more information and to book a place: conor.lynych@octaviafoundation.org.uk or **07985 692369**.

More information can be found at: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/base

Find us on insta: [@weareoctavia](https://www.instagram.com/weareoctavia)

Promoting best quality of life for extra care residents

Octavia's Care team and St Christopher's Hospice have jointly developed a bespoke resource to promote a better quality of life for extra care residents towards the end of their life.

The 'Better Lives, Better Endings' resource helps extra care teams provide best quality care through enabling them to be more confident with providing support for residents right up to the end of life and ensuring residents' wishes and preferences are met.

Octavia's Care team is already using the tool at our seven extra care schemes in west London. It has also been shared with peers across the housing sector as an example of good practice.

You can find more information about our extra care schemes on our website, www.octaviasupport.org.uk



Having a spring wardrobe clear-out?

Are you having a spring clear-out of clothes, shoes or homeware items? We are looking for new stock for our Octavia charity shops, so please consider donating any of your pre-loved items to us. The funds we raise through our stores help fund our community projects.

Find out more about how to donate here <https://bit.ly/DressMePlease>, or pop into your local Octavia Store to drop your items off. You'll find a list of Octavia charity shops on our website: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/store-finder. Find us on Insta: [@octaviastores](https://www.instagram.com/octaviastores)

Free day centre open days for older people at the Reed

The Kensington Day Centre (KDC) @TheReed is an accessible day centre for older people to meet, eat, be active or creative. It's open Monday to Friday, all year round.

If you are an older person living in Kensington & Chelsea who wants to get more active outside of your home for a few hours a week in a care-supported environment, why not come and take a look at what's on offer at the KDC.

We are offering free to attend open days throughout April and May 2022 so that older people can try out KDC activities and meet other members and Octavia's friendly day-care team.

The KDC is run from Octavia's community hub, The Reed – an accessible, light and modern space – with a quiet, sunny garden – tucked away from bustling Ladbroke Grove in the heart of North Kensington.

Find out more about the free open days at www.octaviasupport.org.uk/KDC or call The Reed on **0208 962 3570**.



Octavia reception update

It's great to be able to meet residents face-to-face again at our receptions at The Reed and Emily House.

Emily House is open for residents who want to see us to discuss a housing related issue, however you do need to book an appointment before you come. This is to ensure there is someone from the housing team at Emily House to meet with you. Appointments can be booked by calling us on 0208 354 5500. We can also arrange for someone from the team to meet you at your home.

The Reed is open for people to drop-in to meet us and to talk to us about our care, support and community services. If you visit seeking to discuss a housing service issue, you will be referred to our appointment system and we can assist you with making the booking.

Most people still prefer the convenience of contacting us via our app, or by email or phone. Please continue to use these channels.

Further details about our reception open times are below:

Location	How we can help
<p>Emily House – 202-208 Kensal Road, W10 5BN</p> <p>Open: 10am - 4pm (Monday to Friday)</p> <p>(Bus routes 23, 18, 28 or 228)</p> <p>Please make an appointment before you come on 020 8354 5500. We can offer support and signposting for visitors with no appointment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing enquiries – appointment required • Freephone to book repairs appointments • Referral to Green Doctors • Referral to our Financial Inclusion service
<p>The Reed – 28 Convent Gardens, W11 1NJ</p> <p>Open: 10am - 4pm (Monday to Friday)</p> <p>(Bus routes 52, 452 and 23 and Ladbroke Grove underground station)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and advice about community support needs • Referral to our Financial Inclusion service • Daily lunch club • Information about services for older people • Assistance with making a Housing appointment • Referral to Green Doctors

Our performance

We measure our performance in all areas of our work to ensure we maintain a good service and to help us improve. A summary of our performance at 31 March 2022 is in the table below.

Overall, services have performed well across many areas. We met our target for rent collection and were slightly below target for rent arrears.

All emergency repairs were completed within target time and we were above target for urgent repair completions. We were slightly below target for time taken to complete

routine repairs and we have also experienced an increase in the number of days taken to re-let empty homes. We are taking measures to address these areas. All fire risk assessments were completed. One gas safety check is outstanding and this is being addressed. We responded to 100% of ASB reports within the target time.

There was an increase in the average time it took for the Customer Contact team to answer calls. This is due to the team moving back to more face-to-face contact with residents as we came out of the pandemic restrictions. We are looking at how we can improve our performance in this area.

Performance indicator	March 2022	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % of rent due (general needs)	3.3%	3.6%	😊
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	100.3%	100.3%	😊
Standard voids – average re-let time in days (year to date)	33	22	😞
% 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	92.8%	99%	😐
% gas safety checks completed	99.9%	100%	😐
% fire risk assessments completed	100%	100%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	100%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (customer contact team)	78	20	😞
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs lines)	7	20	😊
Average time to respond to complaints (in days)	7.5	10	😊
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from our completed repairs survey)	90%	90%	😊

My Octavia app

The My Octavia app is a great way for you to check your rent statement, report repairs and to contact us at a time convenient for you. Find out how you can start using it at www.octaviahousing.org.uk/mobile-app



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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