



Autumn 2023

# Resident Update

Service updates and important information for residents



It also includes the work we have been doing with residents to respond to your concerns and improve our services in areas that matter to you most.

An important part of this work has been the creation of our first Resident Charter, which I would like to take this opportunity to share with you.

## Message from our CEO

Welcome to the latest news update for residents.

In this edition you will find important information and advice about fire safety, as well as updates about service developments.

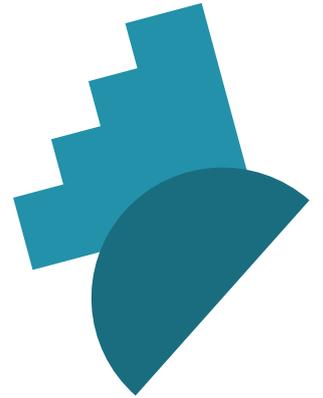


## Our annual report to residents

We will soon publish our latest Annual Report to residents on our website. Please look out for this. The report lets you know how we did against our targets for the last financial year, and it informs you about our performance and achievements.

Our Annual Reports are published on our website here:  
[www.octaviahousing.org.uk/about-octavia-housing/publications](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/about-octavia-housing/publications)

# Introducing our Resident Charter



We want residents' voices to be heard at every level of our organisation, and to influence our decision-making.

It is essential that you know what to expect from your landlord and that's why we worked closely with residents to design our first Resident Charter, which launched this month.

Our Resident Charter demonstrates our commitment to being clear and transparent about what you can expect from us, in terms of service standards and delivering on our promises.

It sets out the standards we hold ourselves to and our responsibilities as they relate to you and your homes.

It is made up of six commitments covering: relationships, communication, voice and influence, accountability, quality, and how we respond and learn when things go wrong, and it's underpinned by our four values: Reliable, Resourceful, Responsive and Respectful.

The charter was a priority we set in our Resident Influence Strategy, also co-designed with residents, and it builds on our adoption of the National Housing Federation's Together with Tenants initiative.

This aims to further strengthen relationships between residents and housing association landlords. You can find out more about it here: [www.housing.org.uk/our-work/together-with-tenants/](http://www.housing.org.uk/our-work/together-with-tenants/)

We will be working towards our charter goals from now on, regularly reviewing progress on our commitments and reporting annually to residents.

**You can read our Resident Charter on our website:** [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/about-octavia-housing/publications](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/about-octavia-housing/publications)

If you have any feedback on the Resident Charter, or would like a printed copy, please let us know by emailing us at: [update@octavia.org.uk](mailto:update@octavia.org.uk)

**Sandra Skeete**  
Octavia CEO

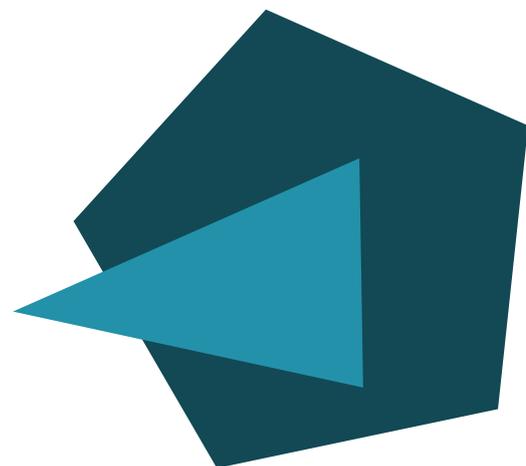
# Our service standards are changing

In line with our Resident Charter, and to ensure we provide a consistently good service standard to you, we have changed our target response time when answering your telephone calls to our main switchboard (020 8354 5500).

Our Customer Experience Team is now aiming to respond to your call within 120 seconds.

We have also updated our greeting to you when we answer your call. You will be asked a few questions to confirm your identity before the advisor deals with your enquiry.

If the adviser cannot resolve your issue during the call, they will redirect your query and arrange for a colleague to call you back promptly.



# We have made changes to our telephone response times

## In an emergency:

For all emergencies, we will continue to return calls within one working day. These include reports of serious threats of anti-social behaviour (ASB), domestic abuse or reports of any safeguarding concerns.

Please continue to report emergency repairs such as leaks or severe structural damage in the usual way by calling 0208 354 5500.

If you report an emergency repair out of office hours, your call will automatically be put through to our out-of-hours response service.

## For all other calls:

For all other calls, our teams will aim to return your call within 3 working days.

## Emails:

You can contact us via our email address: [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk)

Report repairs at: [repairs.octavia@mearsgroup.co.uk](mailto:repairs.octavia@mearsgroup.co.uk)

## How to contact us

[www.octaviahousing.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/contact-us)

We respond to email and letter enquiries within 10 working days.

# e-bikes and e-scooters

Be aware of the fire risk

**Batteries in e-bikes and e-scooters can make them a serious fire risk.**

e-bikes and e-scooters are becoming increasingly popular but their lithium batteries can make them a serious fire risk, particularly if they are damaged or are left on charge with the wrong type of charger.

Converting scooters and bikes to run on electricity with DIY kits can also be a hazard due to the poor quality of some parts, particularly those bought online.

77% of fires with e-bikes are believed to have been started with a battery that was purchased online.

**It is your responsibility to ensure your e-bike or e-scooter is fire safe, particularly when charging the battery.**

**Only ever** charge your e-bike or e-scooter with the charger designed for the battery. Buy your battery from sellers that have a good reputation and always use the correct voltage or charger.

**Never** store or charge your e-bike or e-scooter in a hallway or corridor, either inside your home or in any shared areas of

your block. Don't keep them in areas that block access to doorways.

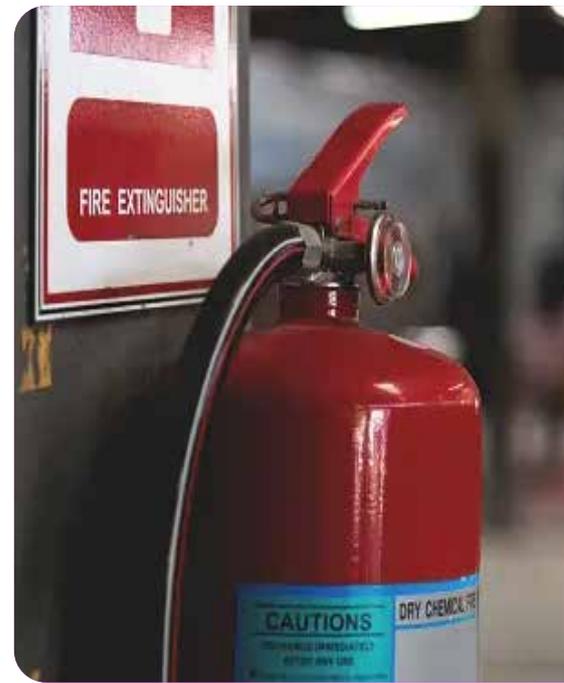
**Don't leave** it on charge when you are asleep or away from home. When the battery is fully charged, unplug it.

For more info about e-scooters and e-bikes: <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/>

# Fire safety: what's your plan?

Fire safety is an incredibly important issue, particularly in and around your home. Everyone should know about fire prevention and what to do if a fire happens.

The safest method of dealing with fires is to take steps to prevent them from happening. But if a fire does start, you need to be clear on what you need to do to keep yourself and your household safe.



## Know your fire evacuation procedure

If you live in a block of flats or street property, make sure you are aware of the evacuation procedure for your home.

If you live in a flat with shared areas, your building's fire notice will be advertised inside the building. You should make sure you, your household members, and visitors to your home are familiar with this.

## Know your escape route

With other members of your household, select an escape route you can use in the event of a fire and make sure everyone knows about it. This needs to be the safest way to leave your home.

Please ensure corridors and doors are kept clear of your possessions at all times so you and others are able to get out quickly if you need to. If the door to your home is kept locked, everyone should be aware of where the keys are kept.

Do not store your possessions in communal areas around your home as this will block escape routes. Do not store flammable items on balconies. For safety reasons, our Estates team will remove any items stored in communal areas.



# LFB fire safety checker

The London Fire Brigade has an online Home Fire Safety Checker tool you can use to get advice specific to your home. It's quick to use and can be tailored to your home. You can access the Home Fire Safety Checker on the LFB website: <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home/home-fire-safety/home-fire-safety-checker-hfsc/>

Always report any fire safety concerns to us at [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk), or call us on 020 8354 5500.



## Protect your possessions with home insurance

Everyone wants to feel safe and secure in their own home. Give yourself that extra piece of mind and insure your contents against loss or damage.

Octavia does not insure furniture, belongings or other personal items within your home against fire, theft, vandalism, burst pipes or any other situation that may affect or damage them. We strongly advise that you take out your own personal home contents insurance to cover this.

A home insurance policy could cost you less than £100 a year.

Octavia has partnered with the National Housing Federation to offer housing contents insurance for social housing tenants at competitive prices.

The insurance is called 'My Home' and you can find out more about it at [www.thistlemyhome.co.uk](http://www.thistlemyhome.co.uk).

See our website for more information: [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/insurance](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/insurance)

## Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

At Octavia, we believe in fair treatment, opportunity, and access to our services for everyone.

Our commitment to race equality is a key part of creating an equal, diverse, and inclusive organisation.

We know a customer's background and identity can impact the service they receive. We want to ensure we develop and deliver services that are inclusive for everyone by identifying barriers and removing them.

You can read our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy on our website: <https://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/about-octavia-housing/publications>

# Cost of living help

## Supporting you through the winter months

We are continuing to prioritise our support for residents through the cost of living crisis. We can help in a number of ways, including helping you access all the financial support and benefits you are entitled to.

### Access to food banks

Food bank services offer a minimum of three days' nutritionally balanced emergency food to people who have been referred to them. They also support and advise people to help them maximise their incomes.

## Food banks provide an essential service and offer practical support

For more information about how we can support you with paying essential household bills and managing money see: [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/financial-support](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/financial-support)

Food banks provide an essential service during times of crisis, which is compassionate and non-judgemental.

They can offer practical support to people to tackle the root causes that lock people into poverty, i.e. debt and build people's resilience, so they are less likely to need a food bank in the future.



We can assist you by identifying foodbank services close to your home.

Places of support in Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea boroughs can be found here: [www.westminster.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/food-support-services](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/food-support-services). For all other boroughs, please contact us for more information.

# Help with keeping your home warm

## Extra support available this winter

Now the weather has got colder we are aware that some residents will be struggling to be able to afford to heat their homes.

If you are worried about paying your heating bills, or at risk of having your power cut off, contact us. We have access to a number of financial support services for residents and may be able to help you.

For example, we can provide access to fuel vouchers for residents using pre-paid meters, if they are at risk of losing their electricity supply. Each voucher is valid for 30 days and is worth £49.

If you are struggling to afford to buy enough food or meet your essential household bills, please speak to our Financial Resilience team for more assistance. You can contact them at [financial.resilience@octavia.org.uk](mailto:financial.resilience@octavia.org.uk) or on 020 8354 5500. We will work with you to do what we can to help.

## Tenancy fraud

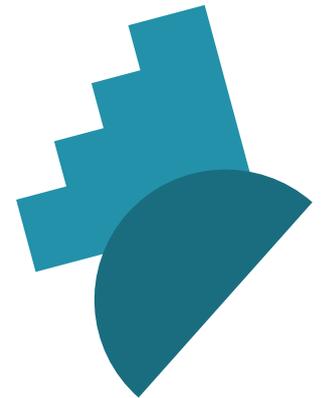
Tenancy fraud is when a tenant provides false information to gain an Octavia home, sublets the home to someone else, or does not use it as their only, or main, home.

We take this extremely seriously and will investigate any reports of possible tenancy

fraud. If you are aware of a suspected tenancy fraud, please contact us to report this on 020 8354 5500.

You can also report your concerns anonymously to our tenancy fraud hotline on 020 8354 5575.

# Keeping your home pest free



## How to deal with pests in your home

### Household pests are animals or insects that can be harmful to humans.

They can infest your home and cause illness and other problems. Pests can be mice or rats, or insects such as fleas or bed bugs.

It's important to protect your home against pests. If you have a pest incident inside your home (including private gardens, terraces, and balconies), it is your responsibility to treat the infestation.

Our pest control service provides pest control in the shared areas of homes. The cost for this is covered within your service charges. We only provide treatment within individual homes where an infestation is affecting multiple properties within a building.

The best way to avoid pest problems is by keeping your home clean and tidy, and free from rubbish that might attract them. Top tips for keeping your home pest-free include:

- Keep kitchen surfaces and floors clean
- Keep rubbish and recycling in bags and dispose of them in your bin store
- Don't leave food out and throw food

waste away

- Store food in sealed containers
- Keep your garden tidy

### Bed bugs

Problems with bed bugs in the home are generally due to bad luck. There are some things you can do, however, to avoid bringing bed bugs into your home:

- When travelling, if you are staying somewhere new, check for signs of bed bugs
- Be careful where you place your luggage, as latching onto people's bags is a common way for bed bugs to move from one place to another.
- Be careful when buying second-hand furniture and be especially careful about reusing discarded furniture left outside by others. Do not take second-hand furniture into your home without checking it thoroughly first.
- Vacuum your home regularly, particularly around the bed and always wash bedding in a hot wash.

To find out more about bed bugs and how to prevent them in your home see:

<https://bpca.org.uk/>

# Dealing with damp and mould

## Mould can make homes very unhealthy for people and it needs to be treated

Mould spots can appear on walls, ceilings and floors in areas around your home where it is damp. This is usually worse at colder times of the year. Mould can make homes very unhealthy for people and it needs to be treated.

A lot of mould in the home is caused by condensation from people cooking, washing, and even breathing.

To prevent condensation build-up causing mould it is important to keep your home well ventilated. Keep windows or vents open a little, most of the time – even in winter. The colder your home is the more likely dampness will settle so ensure you put the heating on every day when it is cold outside – even if it is just for a few hours a day.

Always open windows or use extractor fans when cooking or showering. Try to dry your clothes outdoors, and avoid drying them on radiators. When drying clothes inside, use a clothes airer and keep the window open in the room, to allow the damp air out. Keep areas around tumble dryers well-ventilated too.

For more information, see: [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/repairs-damp](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/repairs-damp)

## We take treating damp and mould very seriously

Some damp and mould problems are not related to condensation. Leaky pipes and gutters can also contribute to making your home damp.

If you have a problem with mould in your home call us on 020 8354 5500, or email [dampandmould@octavia.org.uk](mailto:dampandmould@octavia.org.uk). If possible send us photos of the issue. We'll send out one of our inspectors to investigate the cause and work with you to resolve it.

# New service suppliers

## New providers for gas, electric and water services

We wrote to you in September to inform you our new contractors for providing gas, electrical, and water services to your home.

K&T Heating Limited is now carrying out ongoing gas and central heating repairs, and annual gas servicing, as well as servicing of our communal plant systems. These services were previously provided by Village Heating Ltd (VHL).

K&T Heating is also now undertaking our communal and domestic electrical testing. A second new contactor, Riverside Environmental Services, is carrying out water monitoring services.

We apologise for any inconvenience the change may have caused, and thank you for your patience and understanding.

### Reporting repairs

To report a gas or central heating repair, Monday to Friday 8:30am – 5pm: Contact us on the usual number 020 8354 5500 and when prompted select Option 1.

This will transfer you directly to K&T Heating Ltd. Please do also let us know if we need to make any special arrangement with you in order to visit your home.

You can also contact K&T directly on 020 4542 2058 or email:

[Octavia@ktheating.co.uk](mailto:Octavia@ktheating.co.uk)

### Please always check for ID before allowing one of our operatives into your home.

This logo is displayed on the K&T Heating engineers' badges.



## Looking to make friends with like-minded people?

Come and join us for a coffee or a cuppa at The Reed social group. It's free and you will find fun and friendly conversation. The social group is for anyone aged over 50.

- When: Mondays 2pm – 3:30pm
- Where: The Reed, 28 Convent Gardens, W11 1NH

Contact: [Meenaxi.chavda@octavia.org.uk](mailto:Meenaxi.chavda@octavia.org.uk) or call 07341 489839 for more information.

# Resident Panel update

Our Resident Panel continues to work hard to scrutinise and influence our service and to ensure we are acting on the feedback we receive.

In recent months, the panel has:

- Advocated for residents who contacted them regarding service charge increases
- Questioned us on our portfolio, income and investment strategy
- Given feedback and guidance on our annual performance report to residents

The panel has set their priorities for the areas of our work that they want to be more involved with.

This includes; keeping our homes as affordable as possible and our continued support for residents with the cost of living; safety and security of homes and managing anti-social behaviour; and improving resident satisfaction with our services.

Do you have an issue that you would like to highlight with the Resident Panel? If you do you can contact them about it at: [be.involved@octavia.org.uk](mailto:be.involved@octavia.org.uk)



# Your feedback

## Learning from local insights

In recent months we have met with residents from Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Brent, and Hounslow to discuss their local issues.

We received feedback on local issues from more than 400 residents.

From these meetings we have:

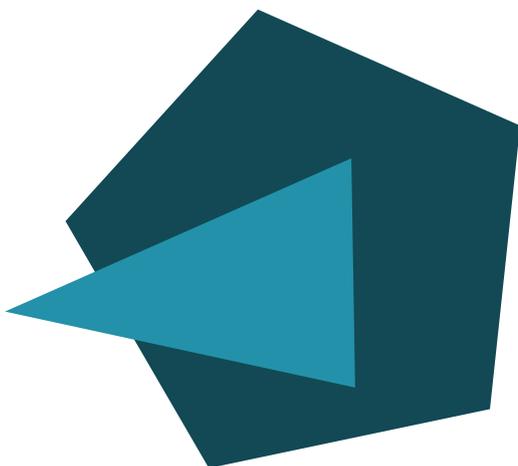
- Carried out repairs to balcony walkways at O'Neill House
- Worked with the resident association at Cochrane Street to make their local community hall available for resident activities
- Carried out window inspection surveys at Princes Place, to prepare a planning application for replacements

- Co-designed a plan of improvement for tree management and the garden at Johnson House
- Carried out repairs and communal area improvements highlighted by residents at Du Cane Road
- Organised a programme of communal garden improvements with residents at Hesketh and Mary Place
- Started exploring options for enhancing security at Colvin House, following recent incidents highlighted by residents

We also discussed how we can help to prevent and deal with damp and mould in homes, and shared information about our cost-of-living support for people.

Safety and security of homes and managing anti-social behaviour, as well as improving resident satisfaction with our services, was also discussed.

**We received feedback on local issues from more than 400 residents**



# Could you be a volunteer?

## The Octavia Foundation is looking for people who can volunteer one hour a week

The Octavia Foundation is looking for people who can volunteer to spend time with an isolated older person and help make a difference in their lives.

Our befriending service offers vital support to vulnerable or lonely adults in central and west London.

Every person we support is carefully matched with a volunteer befriender who makes contact with them every week.

The role of a befriender can vary depending on the person a volunteer is matched with and the support they need.

It could involve meeting for a chat over a cup of tea, taking a walk or going shopping. These visits are a lifeline for people in our community, and often lead to long-lasting friendships.

Hundreds of local people volunteer their time with the Octavia Foundation each year, supporting local people during times of personal difficulty or crisis. Could you be one of them?

You can find more information about volunteering with the Octavia Foundation on our website at:

- [www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/volunteer)
- You can also contact us at [volunteering@octavia.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@octavia.org.uk)



**Hundreds of people volunteer their time with us each year. Could you be one of them?**

## What do you think of this update?

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

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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## Contact us

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

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

Customer Experience Team: **020 8354 5500** [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk)

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

### Octavia

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