

EDITION 36: SUMMER 2019 - Simple, up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

OCTAVIA IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD - SUMMER FUN



In July, over 200 of you joined in with our annual resident fun day *Octavia In Your Neighbourhood*. This year, 'Your Voice', a new group of residents, joined together from the previous Tenant Steering Group and the Service Scrutiny Panel, went along to the event to talk to as many people as possible. They went to get feedback from other residents about what it feels like to be living in social housing, which will form part of a larger piece of research being carried out by the National Housing Federation. They also wanted to hear from residents about the things you consider to be priorities for Octavia for the coming year.

Your Voice replaces both the Tenant Steering Group and the Service Scrutiny Panel, which were two groups of residents that previously worked with Octavia to improve the way we work for residents. The new Your Voice group is designed to be a more flexible and effective way of engaging with all residents. If you want to know more about this group or other ways to be involved in the way we work, please get in touch at be.involved@octavia.org.uk.

As well as getting your feedback, the event at City of Westminster College provided residents with advice and support about services available from Octavia and other local organisations. We also had all the usual fun and entertainment for all ages including face painting, arts and crafts, dancing and nail art.

Residents had the chance to find out about volunteering with us, how to get involved with the new Octavia Community Choir and our new app, which will be available for all soon.

Thank you to everyone who came, and a big thank you to Mears, Village Heating and John O'Conner who all made donations for the prize draw. We have a summer fun day every year to meet residents, new and old, so if you didn't manage to make it this time, we would love to see you next year.

What do you think of this newsletter?

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

Do you have a passion for caring for other people?



Have you ever considered a career in care?

We are looking for new people to join Octavia's outstanding care team. If you have a passion for caring for others, a career in care could be the ideal role for you.

We are seeking new carers to join us. You could be someone who has knowledge of providing care to others, either in your personal life, as a volunteer or in a previous job role. We are looking for people who share our values and want to develop their skills to become a first-rate professional carer. If you think you can provide great personal care and support, and want to make a real difference to the lives of our older residents - why not apply to work with us?

Octavia's care services are delivered across seven extra care schemes, all located in North Kensington, Westminster and Hounslow. The schemes provide modern, accessible homes for local older people, who have a range of physical and mental health needs.

Our care team is award-winning and our services have been rated consistently 'Good' by Care Quality Commission, with one recently awarded 'Outstanding' for responsiveness. We believe it is our staff who make our services outstanding and so we are committed to investing in them to ensure they feel valued and supported. If you join us you will be part of an amazing team of people.

To find out more about working with us, contact us on [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500) and ask to speak to Human Resources. To find out more about current opportunities, go to: www.octavia.org.uk/careers

Octavia volunteers celebrate at Lambeth Palace



Over 100 volunteers came to our annual Volunteer Awards Ceremony at Lambeth Palace in June to celebrate the valuable contribution they make to people in our communities.

The event, held during National Volunteers' Week, highlighted the contributions of everyone who makes a huge difference by donating their time to help Octavia deliver our services and activities.

We received more than 100 award nominations this year for the seven award categories – reflecting outstanding performance in assisting in one of Octavia's charity shops, befriending an older or lonely person, helping at one of Octavia's care schemes, taking part in one of Octavia's youth programmes, or being involved in community or resident groups that help to improve lives for a wider group of people.

This year's event was hosted by west London resident, comedian and author Shappi Khorsandi, who delighted and entertained in equal measure.

Talking about the initiative, Shappi said: "As someone who has grown up and still lives in London, I am really pleased to be part of an event that recognises the extraordinary contribution Octavia volunteers make to improving lives of local people and building happier communities."

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"The individuals celebrated at this event have a lasting impact on those who they help. In true London fashion, they come from a diversity of backgrounds and yet are all driven by the desire to improve someone else's quality of life."

The winners were selected by a panel of judges, which this year included guest judge Dr Diahanne Rhiney, award-winning agent of change and Founder of the "Strength With In Me" Foundation, as well as Gwen Godfrey and Reena Mukherji, respectively Chair and Director of the Octavia Foundation.

Sarah Mbatha, Director of Homes, Care & Community at Octavia, said: *"The contributions made by our volunteers is essential to helping us deliver on our mission and our Volunteer Awards Ceremony is one way that we can recognise and thank them for the brilliant work that they do. They are all worthy winners in our eyes and I'd like to thank all our sponsors for making the evening possible."*

Pictured are Shappi and Rita Goff, the winner of the Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award for her hard work in our Askew Road Octavia Foundation shop. Rita has been a shop volunteer for 18 years and received more than five nominations from different individuals. She was described in her nomination as being *"one of the most reliable and friendly people ever known"*.

To find out more about volunteering opportunities with Octavia, go to: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/volunteer

Claiming Universal Credit? – what you should know

Universal Credit has now been rolled out across the UK. If you need to apply for Universal Credit, please contact our income team on [0208 354 5500](tel:02083545500).

5 things you need to know about Universal Credit

1. What is Universal Credit paid for?

Universal Credit is to cover your living expenses and housing costs. You may be eligible for help with your living expenses, housing costs or both.

2. Managing your claim

All aspects of your claim are managed online via your journal. If you are unemployed or working minimal hours, your **claimant commitment** may require you to complete various activities within a particular deadline. We advise you to **check your journal daily** and **complete your activities as soon as possible** to prevent your benefit from being stopped.

3. Payment of Universal Credit

You will receive your Universal Credit payments on the same day each month, just like if you are working; however - it can take up to 5 weeks to receive your first payment of Universal Credit. Ask your Work Coach about an Advanced Payment of Universal Credit if you are struggling whilst waiting for your first payment.

4. Paying your rent

Unlike Housing Benefit, the Housing Costs element of your Universal Credit payment is not paid directly to Octavia; this means you are responsible for paying your rent in full. We recommend that you set up a direct debit to pay your rent, which can be done quickly and easily by telephone. This will mean one less bill to remember to pay.

If you fall into difficulties paying your rent or are unable to manage your money, an **Alternative Payment Arrangement** can be set up so that your Housing Costs are paid directly to Octavia.

5. Council Tax Support

Council Tax Support is a benefit to help you pay your Council Tax bill, which is not included with your Universal Credit claim. To apply - you will need to make an online application directly with your local council.

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It is important that you contact your Income Officer as soon as you apply for Universal Credit to let them know that you have moved onto it.

If you need help making a claim for Universal Credit or you are struggling to pay your rent, the following assistance is available to you:

Financial Inclusion, budgeting advice to ensure you can manage to pay your main bills

Employment & Training, help to get a job or a better paid job

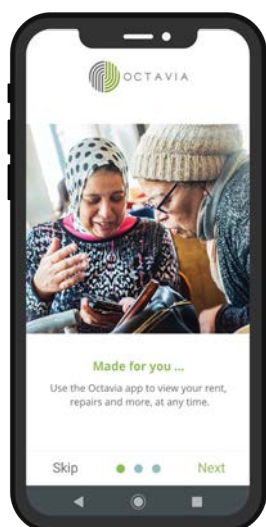
Citizens Advice, independent and free benefit & debt advice

Floating Support, to help you to maintain your tenancy if you are experiencing difficulties or referral for a food bank voucher

Energy Advice, help to manage and reduce your fuel bills

Please contact us if you would like to be referred to any of the above.

My Octavia app update



Our new mobile app is now up and running and is undergoing an important set of checks before being rolled out to all residents in a few weeks' time.

The My Octavia app will allow residents to carry out a number of transactions, including viewing your rent account balance, transactions and statements, and tracking the status of your repairs, from your Android or iPhone smartphone. It's an exciting new service that will give you 24/7 access to your personal rent account and a number of other services directly from your mobile phone.

We are currently carrying out final testing with help from a group of residents who have volunteered to support us with this task by registering to be our first users. Once this is completed the app will be made available for all.

What's on at Base this summer?

The Base summer programme at The Reed is underway, offering weeks of outings and activities for younger people over the school summer holiday.

Activities include trips to the seaside, London's Science Museum, 'Oxygen freejumping' trampolining, and The Beach at Brent Cross. There's also lots going on at The Reed with workshops in music production, animation, gaming, graphic design, coding and filmmaking. Meals are provided with workshops.

All activities are FREE and open to young people aged 10 to 21 years old (up to 25 years for young people with additional needs) but you need to book as spaces are limited. Contact Conor Lynch on base@octavia.org.uk for more information or to register your interest. For a full timetable of activities, go to: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk



New, important fire safety advice about your home



You may be aware that the Government has recently issued new advice about risks of fires on buildings with wooden balconies or external walls.

We want to remind all residents that BBQs are not allowed on any balconies in our developments.

This is already a term of tenancy agreements but in the light of a recent fire, we are writing to all residents to let them know that for the safety of everyone, the use or storage of any flammable items on balconies or on the ground floor next to external walls, including BBQs, is not allowed. This applies whether the balcony is made of wood or any other material.

Our top priority is resident safety and we hope that you will work with us to make sure that this, and other safety advice, is followed by everyone in your building.

If you have any concerns or if you would like further advice, you can contact us or report an issue to us at info@octavia.org.uk, or call us on **020 8354 5500**.

Our contact team gets a thumbs up from mystery shoppers

Residents have highly rated our contact team services in a recent 'mystery shopping' exercise. A group of residents involved with helping us improve our services were asked to call the contact team over a period of two weeks as 'mystery shoppers' to make various enquiries and service requests and then feedback to us about their experience.

We were pleased to hear that all of them (100%) were very happy with how their call was greeted and most were very happy with the customer care they received. Most said staff were polite, courteous and responsive to their enquiry (87.5%) - in the majority of cases resolving it during the call. More than 71% were very happy with the manner of the staff they spoke to. We also received some very useful feedback on how the service could be improved. For example, some callers said they would have liked to have been more reassured that staff had all the information they needed to act on their requests. We are looking at this feedback to see how we can improve in this area.



Mystery shopping is a tool used by companies to measure the quality of their service from a customer perspective and to find out how services can be improved. Our mystery shoppers were recruited from a group of residents who have volunteered their time to get involved and give us their views. If you want to get involved in helping us improve the services we provide, contact us at be.involved@octavia.org.uk for more information.

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The Octavia contact team can help you with more than 70 different resident services, including:

- ▶ rent payments, Direct Debits and payment plans;
- ▶ tenancy queries;
- ▶ fire safety advice;
- ▶ cleaning and communal areas; and
- ▶ financial support and advice.

Call the contact team on [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500) to request a service or email: info@octavia.org.uk.

Floating support services – available to Octavia tenants



As an Octavia resident floating support services may be available to you. The service is designed to provide short to medium term support and interactions to promote personal wellbeing, independence and a better quality of life. Our support workers assist people in their day to day lives and in managing their home. This may be due to financial difficulties, physical or mental health needs, or a disability. We can also signpost for other services.

We can offer support in the following ways:

- ▶ **staying healthy and well:** support with managing physical or mental health needs, finding new ways to keep healthy or develop confidence;
- ▶ **being active in the community:** helping people to access local education, training and leisure facilities, or cultural or faith activities;
- ▶ **staying safe:** making sure that people's homes are safe and secure, and helping to protect people from harm, abuse and neglect;
- ▶ **adaptations:** helping to arrange adaptations and assessments for adaptations;
- ▶ **moving:** helping you to downsize or move to sheltered accommodation;
- ▶ **managing money:** advice to help individuals make the most of their income, budget effectively, claim benefits and deal with debt; and
- ▶ **completing paperwork:** including filling in forms, help to access other support services and helping you reply to letters.

If you would like to find out more about how we can support you, please contact the floating support team on [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500) or email us at shelteredsupport@octavia.org.uk

Finding it hard to pay your energy bills?

If you are finding it hard to afford to heat your home and especially if you think this might be affecting your health, Green Doctors may be able to help.

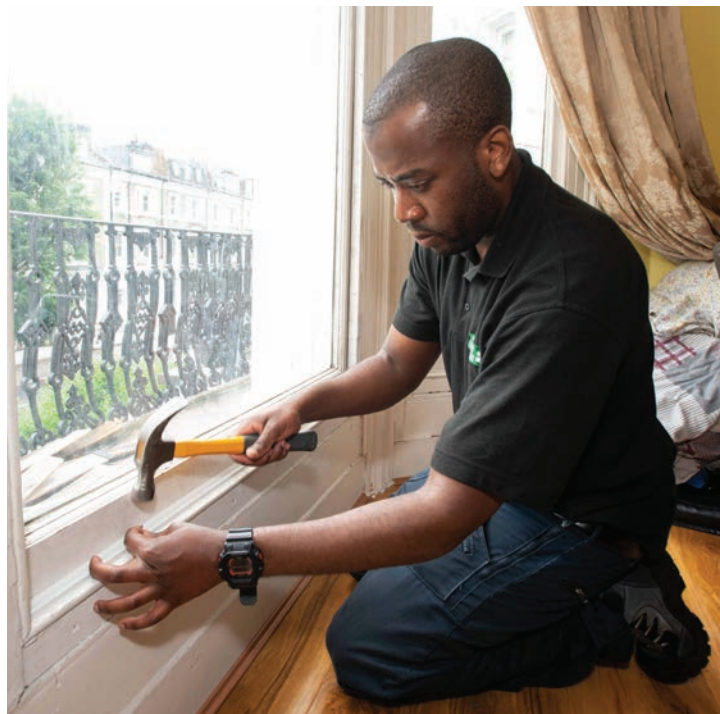
They can offer FREE help if you are over 65 years old, on a low income or have a long term health condition or disability.

A visit from the Green Doctors could make your home warmer, while saving you money.

Green Doctors can:

- Explain how to make your home energy efficient
- Instal energy saving devices
- Offer impartial advice on switching fuel companies to save money
- Provide income support and debt advice
- Put you in touch with other useful services

To book a free Green Doctor home visit, or for more information, call [0300 365 5003](tel:03003655003) or email: GreenDoctorsLDN@groundwork.org.uk



Welcome to our new Chief Executive, Sandra Skeete



A very warm welcome goes to Sandra Skeete, who is Octavia's new Chief Executive.

Sandra has taken over from Grahame Hindes, who is known to many residents as he led the organisation for over 18 years before deciding to retire.

Sandra brings over 25 years of experience working in social housing, holding senior roles in organisations such as Peabody and Refugee Housing, and she currently sits on the Board of One Housing and the Duke of Lancaster Housing Trust.

Sandra said: "Octavia is an organisation with a long history of consistently delivering its social purpose. I am looking forward to helping take the organisation on to its next phase – building more homes and helping more local people."

Sandeep Katwala, Chair of Octavia said: "With affordable housing as the most pressing policy issue facing London we are absolutely delighted and excited that Sandra has agreed to lead the organisation. The Board members, staff and residents who were involved in the selection process were all impressed by her strong mix of experience and commitment to our purpose".

Sandra is joining Octavia in September so you will be seeing more of her later in the year.

Our Performance

We check on our performance in all areas of our work in order to improve. A summary of how we are doing in key areas is below. We have set ourselves a target for the year April 2019 to March 2020 for each indicator and this information shows how we are doing so far.

We are doing well in a number of areas, including completing emergency repairs on time and responding to reported anti-social behaviour quickly. Letting our vacant properties quickly is improving but slightly out of target; we will monitor this closely to make sure we improve further.

Performance indicator	June 2019	March 2020 Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	4.5%	3.9%	☹️
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	100.4%	100.3%	😊
Standard voids – average re-let time in days	23	22	☹️
% of emergency repairs completed within target time	100%	99%	😊
% of urgent repairs completed within target time	99.3%	99%	😊
% of routine repairs completed within target time	99.5%	98%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (customer contact team)	19	20	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	6	20	😊
Average time to respond to complaints (in days)	9	10	😊
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from our completed repairs survey)	96%	95%	😊

Thinking of joining a choir?

Singing with a choir can be great way to meet people, and improve your wellbeing. That's why Octavia has started a choir that meets once a week at The Reed community centre, North Kensington. Our choir entertains at local events and at our schemes for older people. It's free to attend, meets at 5.30pm on Wednesdays (from 14 August) and is open to all. You don't have to be an experienced singer and new members are always welcome. If you're interested in finding out more, please contact us at choir@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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বাংলা Français Português Shqip فارسی