

EDITION 35: SPRING 2019 - Simple, up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

# UPDATE NEWSLETTER

## WE'RE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS



Every year, hundreds of dedicated volunteers give up their time to help us in our mission to create Good Homes, Better Lives. They make a big difference to the lives of local people – either as befrienders to local isolated or excluded people; as youth workers and helpers who assist us to deliver training and opportunities for young people or by volunteering to help in one of our 20 charity shops.

We hugely value our volunteers and we simply could not do the community work that we do without their support.

Could you make a difference? We provide training and support and we offer a wide range of flexible options depending on how much time you have to give. Just donating one hour a week of your time can make a great deal of difference to the lives of some of the people we help to support.

Volunteering is exceptionally rewarding and you can directly see the value of your work in the local community. It can also help you gain skills and make new friends.

To find out more about our different volunteer opportunities, or to apply to volunteer, please visit our Foundation website here [www.octaviafoundation.org.uk](http://www.octaviafoundation.org.uk)

### 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 0800 479 0011 (freephone)

Contact centre:

T 020 8354 5500 E [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk)

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

## Emily House reception services are changing



When asked about our services, many of you said that you would like faster responses to some enquiries. You have also asked for more convenient ways of contacting us at times that suit you. As a result of your feedback, we're making some changes over the next few months.

### **New ways of contacting us**

We have started by making our Contact Team the first point of contact for all enquiries. The team can now handle requests for 75% of the services we provide to residents – and many of these can be dealt with in one telephone call.

We are also developing a new app that will provide a convenient way for you to contact us from your mobile device. Using the app will also be a really quick way to access your account 24/7 to check your rent payments and balance and monitor your reported repairs.

### **More home visits**

Our next step is to make some changes to how our specialist housing staff work, to enable them to work away from Emily House and visit our properties and residents in their homes more often.

### **Visiting Emily House? – please phone us first**

So that staff can better manage their time and make more visits to properties and residents in their homes, we are asking that if you need to come to our office at Emily House to speak to someone from the specialist housing team, please book an appointment first. Without a pre-booked appointment, the staff you want to see may not be in the building or free to meet you when you come.

You only need to arrange an appointment to see specialist housing staff. These are our Resident Services Officers, Building Inspectors and Communal Services Team Leaders. You **do not** need a pre-booked appointment to:

- ▶ speak to someone about your rent;
- ▶ attend a Citizens Advice drop-in session;
- ▶ receive welfare support e.g. food vouchers;
- ▶ report an emergency;
- ▶ deliver a letter by hand.

It's easy to contact us to request an appointment. You can do it in any of the following ways:

- ▶ phone us - call the contact team on 020 8354 5500; or
- ▶ email us on [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk); or
- ▶ contact us online via our new mobile phone app.

You can also contact us via our website [www.octaviahousing.org.uk](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk) Enquiries from the website go straight to our Contact Team and are dealt with in the same way as calling or emailing them.

## Meet new friends over coffee



We offer residents opportunities to meet up with like-minded people through a series of events held throughout the year by the Octavia Foundation. There are a range of different activities to take part in, including weekly coffee mornings and seasonal festivities. The sessions offer a safe space for residents to share experiences and make new friends. Many people have become firm friends through meeting up at these events.

The service is free and open to isolated and vulnerable adults aged 18 and over. We take referrals from external agencies, friends and family members, and people who refer themselves.

If you are interested joining in the activities, or would like to refer someone, please contact Hani Mohamed, Community Befriending officer, on [0208 354 5500](tel:02083545500) or via email: [info@octaviafoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@octaviafoundation.org.uk).

## Asbestos in homes – what you need to know

Asbestos is a mineral fibre which was used as insulation in buildings and in brake linings and other industrial products until its use was banned in 1999. Breathing asbestos dust can be harmful to health.

If your home was built after 1999 it doesn't contain any asbestos. Older buildings, particularly any built between the 1950s and the 1980s, may contain asbestos but most materials which were used in housing contain only small amounts and will not release any asbestos fibres under normal circumstances. It is completely safe to live in a home like this.

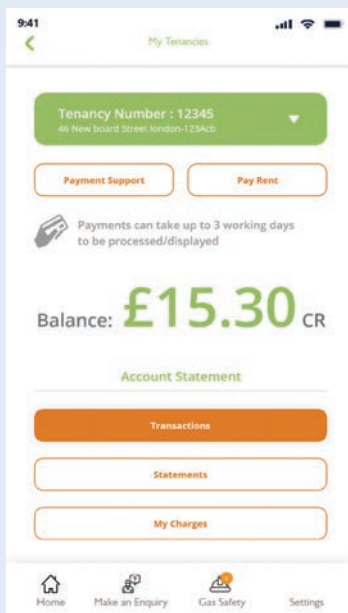
Asbestos can be found in older vinyl floor tiles, plastic toilet cisterns or in artex coatings on ceilings, so we warn residents not to drill into or sand these items.

Octavia is committed to managing the risks from asbestos materials and almost all the asbestos which could become a health risk has been removed from our properties. If you are concerned that there may be asbestos in your home, please contact us.

For more information, go to: [www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/living-in-your-home-and-neighbourhood/fire-and-home-safety/home](http://www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/living-in-your-home-and-neighbourhood/fire-and-home-safety/home)



## New mobile app to launch in May



Octavia's new mobile app, which will make it quicker and easier for you to view your rent statements and track reported repairs from your smart phone, is due to launch in May.

This first version of the app is designed to enable you to quickly access your information any time of day, so you can view your account and contact us at a time that suits you. Through the app you will be able to:

- ▶ See your rent balance, transactions and monthly rent statements;
- ▶ View your reported repairs and track their status;
- ▶ Contact us to request services and provide feedback;
- ▶ View the status of your gas safety certificate; and
- ▶ Update your personal details

This is the first version of the app so please give us your feedback. Over time, we will be adding different services to the app so you can do more online if you prefer to.

To use the app on your iPhone or Android device, you will log in using your web/rent account number (which can be found on your rent statements or in your welcome booklet). You will then be able to activate your account with a code we will send you by text or email. We need your current email address / phone number to do this, so if you think your account details need updating, please send the updates to us at [www.octavia.org.uk/residentdetails](http://www.octavia.org.uk/residentdetails). You can send your feedback on the app to [update@octavia.org.uk](mailto:update@octavia.org.uk).

## Changes to the repairs service



After a formal selection process carried out last year, Mears has been awarded a new ten-year contract to deliver general repairs and planned works to your home.

The new contract started at the beginning of April and you will see some changes to the repairs service. From now on we will be handling repairs in a more streamlined way and you should soon see the benefits.

Now, when you call us to report a repair to be carried out by our specialist contractors (such as; pest control services and shared area repairs like, lifts, door entry systems, barrier gates, fire alarm panels and TV aerials), you will speak to Mears directly. They will assign a contractor who will call you to arrange an appointment within one working day.

Mears will also be carrying out all pre-inspections for general repairs, so if you call us to ask for someone to come out and have a look at a problem you have in your home, a Building Inspector from Mears will visit you to determine if this is something we can repair. If the repair is something we are responsible for, the Mears Building Inspector will discuss the issue with you and will make sure that you are given an appointment for the work to take place.

It's important that you always ask people coming to your home to show you their ID before you let them in. All Mears operatives carry identification (ID) cards, whether they are directly employed by the contractor, or if they are a sub-contractor. They will be happy to show you their ID when asked.

These changes are being made to make reporting repairs easier for residents. Octavia staff will continue to inspect work carried out by Mears to make sure the new system is working well. For more information on how to report a repair – go to:

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

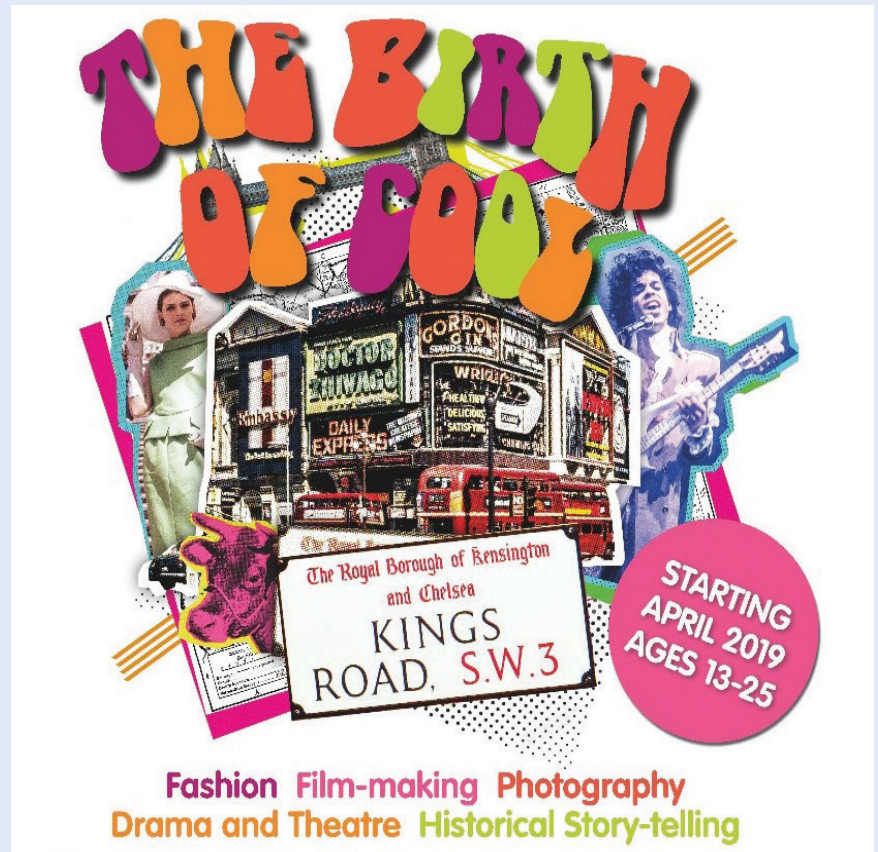
## Celebrating the 'birth of cool' on the King's Road

We are running a new digital media youth project this Spring. 'The Birth of Cool' is looking for people aged 13-15 to get involved in film-making, photography and drama to celebrate the iconic history of the King's Road in the 1950s to 1980s.

Backed by National Lottery Funding, the project will encourage young people to reimagine this distinctive time of style and fashion, creating various pieces of media to show the influence that the area and local people had on culture and the rest of society.

We are really excited to have professionals from film, culture and fashion involved, including the Tate and V&A galleries, as well as BBC fashion historian Amber Butchart and film-maker Bani Mendy.

We are running the project from Base@theReed, where young creatives will be able to learn and use our state of the art digital media equipment, which were kindly gifted to us through local fundraisers.



The project started in April with workshops every Wednesday and Thursday evening and during half-term holidays at our intergenerational centre, The Reed, in North Kensington. If you want to get involved you can find out more about it in the '60 second interview' with our Digital Project Manager, Tommy, on the next page.

## Better Lives Community Fund



The Octavia Foundation has helped more than 20 local charities to provide activities and services that target loneliness and social isolation in the local community, through our 'Better Lives Community Fund'.

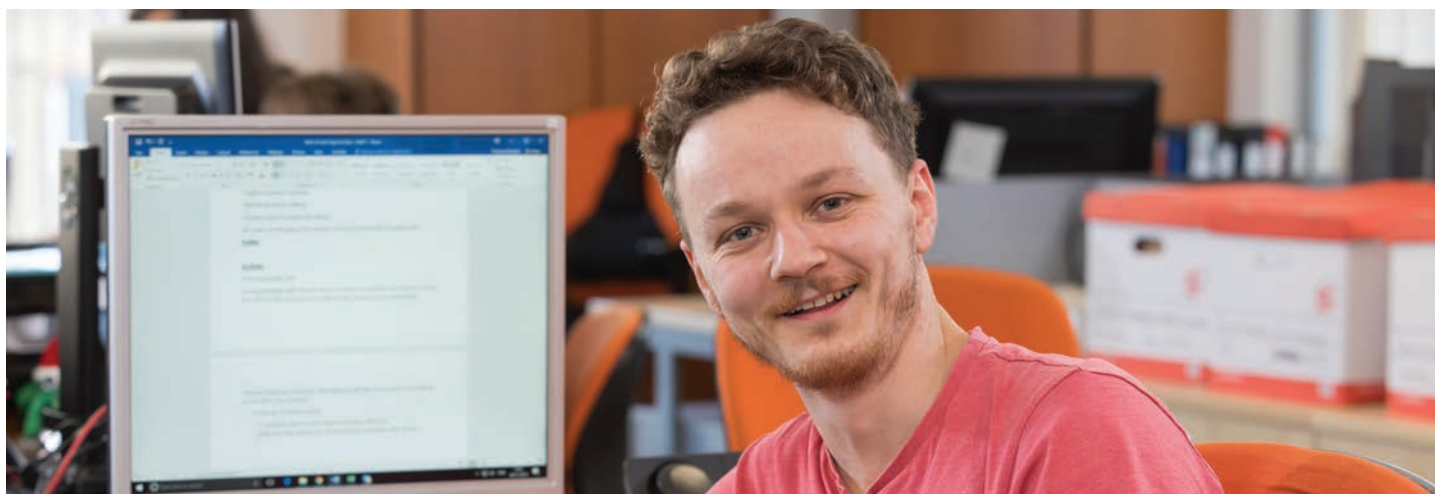
The fund was set up to support projects that help local people who are otherwise at risk of being isolated, lonely or excluded, to build social connections.

Last year we invited local charities in Westminster and RBKC to apply for our latest round of funding and 23 have been awarded with grants of up to £5,000.

One of the beneficiaries of the fund is the All Stars Youth and Boxing Gym, based in a former Church in Queens Park. For a small fee the charity offers a packed calendar of non-contact exercise and boxing classes to young people aged six years and over. Through a mixture fitness training and mentoring, the club promotes wellbeing and social inclusion. The Better Lives Community Fund grant will go towards helping to maintain the building.

## 60 seconds .... with Tommy, Digital Media Project Manager for the Octavia Foundation.

Tommy is a media training specialist who helps to run our free youth projects and activities at Base@theReed (our digital youth club). He is also leading on our exciting new Heritage Lottery Funded project, 'The Birth of Cool'.



### **Can you tell us what a 'digital' youth club is and what it offers young people?**

Our digital youth club runs four evenings a week at The Reed in North Kensington. It is free and offers young people informal enrichment learning using digital technology – photography, music and film - with an emphasis on creative production. It's an unusual mix of teaching younger people new skills on industry standard software and creative hardware, while also encouraging them to collaborate and develop social skills through making new friends with others who have similar interests. Members can develop important transferable skills that will help them with their future careers. They can build on their confidence and with digital as well as express themselves and be creative.

### **What inspires you most about working with young people with digital technology?**

The greatest inspiration for me is how learning digital skills can break down barriers for young people – how it can open a window to the arts and creative industries in lots of different ways. It also provides a platform for young people to have an opportunity to find their own voice and be creative. The results can be really amazing.

### **What's on offer right now at Base@theReed? – what can young people get involved with?**

At the moment we have Media Mondays, Podcast Creation on Tuesdays, Stop-motion Animation on Wednesdays and Film-making on Thursdays. These offer a range of opportunities for young people to enjoy something that suits them. Get in touch if you want to know more about our activities or would like to join the club.

Also, we have just launched our new The Birth of Cool project, which we are all very excited about. The Birth of Cool is a digital media programme centred around the fashion and culture boom between the 50's and 80's along the King's Road. It's kicking off with some film production training from professional film-maker Bani Mendy. Then we will be making a creative documentary about this colourful and transformative era in Chelsea. Those involved will have the opportunity to learn about the cultural heritage of their local area through digital media and the production of a professional standard film.

### **Someone might be keen to come along to Base and get involved but might not feel confident enough to put themselves forward – what would you say to them?**

Base is there for people to take what they want from it. If you simply want to come to make friends and have fun creating, you are welcome to do that. But if you are serious about digital and want to develop skills to follow a career in the medium, the quality of our equipment and facilitators can help guide and support you to reach these goals.

If you are thinking of coming along and want to just find out a bit more about Base first, send us an email or DM us on Twitter, and we will arrange for you to drop in and have chat without necessarily jumping straight in. We can take you around the space, explain the activities and you can maybe attend half a session to see if it the right thing for you.

To find out more about [Base@theReed](#) or to get involved with The Birth of Cool project, email [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk) You can also DM us on [Instagram @OctaviaFoundation](#) and we will get back to you. Spaces for Birth of Cool are limited so if you are interested get in touch soon.



## We are listening to residents



We want residents to be more involved with helping us shape the services we provide to you. In recent months we have been consulting widely with residents through our online channels, resident groups and at our community events, to get your ideas about how we can achieve this.

That is why we have launched a new initiative aimed at getting greater input from residents about our services and how they could be improved.

The initiative includes the launch of a new involvement group. More than half of the group members will be residents – with other members drawn from independent experts and Board members. Called 'Your Voice', the group will be looking at the quality of our services and will recommend any improvements they think are needed. Your Voice replaces our Tenant Steering Group and Services Scrutiny Panel and its views will be fed back to our Board and senior staff.

We will be able to tell you more about Your Voice, later this year, when we will be looking for residents to apply to join it.

In the meantime, there are lots of ways to be involved with influencing our work: through taking part in online surveys and groups, joining focus groups and meeting us at community events. If you want to know more about getting involved as a resident, visit our website, email [be.involved@octavia.org.uk](mailto:be.involved@octavia.org.uk), or call the Contact Team on **020 8354 5500**.

## Fire safety – what's your plan?

Fire safety is an incredibly important issue, particularly in the family home, and everyone should know about fire prevention and how to respond if a fire occurs. 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 family safe. Here are some important tips:

### **Know your 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 evacuation 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 and make sure everyone knows about it. This will be the safest way to leave your home if there is a fire. Ensure the exit to your home is clear at all times, so you are able to get out quickly if you need to. If doors are double locked at any time, everyone should be aware of where the keys are kept - by the door is best.

The London Fire Brigade offer a free home fire safety visit service for anyone wishing to check the fire safety of their home. Anyone can book an advisory visit which will help you understand about important precautions, including smoke and heat alarms, bedtime checks and what to do if there is a fire. To book a free home fire safety visit phone free on **0800 028 4428**, email [smokealarms@london-fire.gov.uk](mailto:smokealarms@london-fire.gov.uk) or go to [www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home/book-a-home-fire-safety-visit/](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home/book-a-home-fire-safety-visit/)

## 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're very pleased to report that we are doing well in many of the areas that you have told us are important to you. We set ourselves high standards and we are always looking for ways to make our services better.

In the coming year, we will be providing lots of opportunities for you to give us your views on our services and we will be feeding back on how we are acting on improvements you say you want to see.

We want to make sure we're making it as easy as possible for as many voices as possible to be heard.

Performance indicator	Mar 2019	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	3.93%	4.5%	😊
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	100.6%	100.5%	😊
Average re-let time in days (year to date)	22	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	99.7%	98%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (Switchboard)	18	20	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	16	20	😊
% responses to complaints within target time	86%	99%	😐
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service	93%	95%	😐

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