

EDITION 45: AUTUMN 2022 – News for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

Keeping residents updated and informed



Message from Octavia's Chief Executive

Welcome to Octavia's Autumn 2022 newsletter. In this edition you will find updates on the work we have been doing over the summer to improve services for residents.

This edition includes information about our new online parking portal which went live at the beginning of the month. The portal gives residents more control and flexibility in managing their parking. Many of you have already signed up to the portal and are finding it useful.

We always aim to provide a high level of service to you but when we do not meet expectations, we are keen to learn from your experiences so that we can improve. After working with many of you on a review of how we handle complaints, we have updated our process to make it clearer and easy to follow. You can find out more about our new process and how it works on page 2.

Also, we've just published our annual report for residents which summarises our work during 2021-2022 and how our services have performed.

I am pleased to say the performance across our key services has been strong. The report is published on our website and we can post a copy to anyone who requests this.

Finally, and most importantly, it's clear from what is going on in the wider economy that many people are struggling financially right now, due to inflation and the recent increases in the price of energy needed to heat your home. In this newsletter we've included information about the targeted energy bill support available from the Government, as well as details about services we offer that may be able to help. If you are struggling to meet your essential bills, talk to us about it. We have dedicated teams at Octavia who are here to help you.

Sandra Skeete



We've published our 2021-2022 annual report for residents

Every year we publish an Annual Resident Report to inform you about our work during the year.

In the report we explain how our services have performed and how the rents we receive have been spent. It also covers how residents have influenced all areas of our work and helped us to improve our services.

We are pleased to report that over the year 2021-2022, performance across our key services was strong:

- We received good feedback on our repairs service, with **90%** of residents saying they were happy with their last repair
- We've continued to prioritise fire safety through our building safety programme and developed more homes for Londoners
- We reviewed our complaints process with residents and made changes so that **97%** of complaints were efficiently resolved by managers
- We've reached more people in the communities where we work than before, providing opportunities for people of all ages to live better lives through services such as befriending, creative activities for young people, and employment and training support

- We've supported hundreds of residents through financial advice and helped them access benefits and other support they are entitled to

Go to our website to read the report in full: www.octaviahousing.org.uk

If you would like a copy of the report to be posted to you, please email your request to update@octavia.org.uk.



Dealing with your complaints

We are committed to providing residents with an exemplary service. While we always strive to be reliable, responsive, respectful and resourceful, occasionally we may not meet your expectations.

When things go wrong, we welcome the opportunity to listen to and understand your concerns so that we can act quickly to put things right.

Following a review of how we manage complaints which many of you participated in, we have updated our complaints policy to enable you to make a complaint more easily and to ensure we respond consistently, fairly and sensitively to your concerns. We now have a clear two-stage process that provides residents with the opportunity to take things further if you are not happy with our initial response to your complaint.

Our complaints policy aims to ensure we:

- Effectively manage and resolve complaints
- Have a fair and effective complaint escalation and review process
- Learn from your feedback to evaluate and improve our services

We welcome all kinds of feedback on our services, whether you are a tenant or shared owner resident, applying for a home with us, or affected by our work in any other way. Comments and compliments from you help us to keep our service standards high, know in what areas we are doing well, and where we need to improve.

The Housing Ombudsman publishes a Complaint Handling Code for housing associations which gives guidance and good practice for landlords on fair and effective complaint handling. We have assessed how we respond to complaints against the code and found that we are compliant.

Our complaints roadmap, which is included with this newsletter, shows our process for responding to complaints. For more information see:

www.octaviahousing.org.uk/complaints

The Housing Ombudsman can be contacted at info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk



How residents are influencing our services

In our last bulletin in the summer, we updated you on the work we are doing with residents to develop a new Resident Influence Strategy. The strategy aims to provide more opportunities for residents to scrutinise and influence our services and how they are run.

A key aspect of delivering on the new strategy is establishing a new residents' panel and a new complaints panel, which will both help to hold Octavia to account and drive improvement. Thank you to all of you who got in touch to register your interest in being involved.

Now that the deadline for applications is closed, we are in the process of looking at all the submissions and will be following up with further discussions with a short-list group later this month.



If you did not apply for either of these roles but still want to be more involved in influencing our work, there are other ways to do this that may interest you. Visit www.octaviahousing.org.uk/be-involved for more information. You can contact us at be.involved@octavia.org.uk, or call **020 8354 5500** and ask to talk to the Resident Involvement Team.

We are here to help

If you are struggling to pay your rent and other essential bills, we can help. We can support you with new benefit claims and challenging benefit decisions, help you manage your debts and, if you need it, help you with access to food. We can also help you with finding new or better-paid employment.

If you are struggling, we are here to help. Call us in confidence on **020 8354 5500** Monday to Friday 9.30 am – 4.30 pm.

- For more information about Octavia's money and benefits advice and support, go to: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/financial-support



Support for RBKC and Westminster residents

Kensington and Chelsea Council is holding sessions for residents of RBKC borough, where you can get help with navigating the benefits and other support available to you. To learn more about these events, or register for training and employment advice, go to <https://bit.ly/3fOZ16x>

Westminster residents can find information about help on offer from their council here: www.westminster.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support

Carbon monoxide and smoke alarms

We are committed to keeping your home safe and we are fully supporting the government-backed drive to ensure all homes with gas boilers have fitted and working carbon monoxide alarms, and that every home has smoke alarms.

We understand that it can be disruptive when contractors come to your home, and we would like to thank everyone we have visited for your cooperation and patience in helping us to complete this work. Please assist us by allowing our operatives access to your home when we contact you to book an appointment with them.

Coping with the energy crisis

It's very important to keep warm enough at home to stay healthy during the winter months. This is especially important for older people, families with young children and people with a disability.

If you are struggling to meet your essential household bills or facing tough choices between heating your home or buying enough food to eat, talk to us. We can help with managing debt and provide benefit advice. We can also help you access other services that can support you if you are struggling financially.

If you are planning on turning down the thermostat a little to help keep the bills down this winter, please don't put your health at risk. Make sure you wear plenty of warm clothing and eat regularly, having at least one hot meal per day.

Don't let your home get damp as this will make it feel even colder. If a home is too cold and there is no ventilation, condensation can build up. In good weather, consider opening windows during the day, and shutting them and putting the heating on in the evening.

Using alternative heating

If you want to use a heater, electric radiators are the safest choice and are relatively energy efficient. Radiant bar heaters and gas heaters are a fire risk, especially if clothes or curtains fall on them, so we ask residents to be especially careful if using one of these. Do not cover any heater with clothing to dry, as this is a fire risk.

Make sure all your electrical goods carry the UKCA mark. Always buy electrical products from reputable retailers. Check the Government's recall list if buying second hand www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls

Never use anything with a naked flame for heating inside your home. Even candles are a fire risk and can be especially dangerous if left in spaces shared with children or pets.

Government support for energy bills

The Government has put in place measures to support people paying home energy bills through two discount schemes:

- **Energy Support Scheme discount** – this applies to all households who have an account with an energy supplier and it will see each household receive £400 by way of monthly reductions to their electricity accounts until the end of March 2023
- **Energy Price Guarantee** – this scheme limits the unit cost of the price of gas and electricity for households until the end of March 2023



Energy support scheme

Under this scheme, residents who pay for their electricity directly to a supplier – eg EON, Scottish Power, or EDF will receive £400 support through the winter. You should have already been contacted by your supplier to confirm how this will work for you.

If you pay by direct debit, you should see a reduction to your monthly direct debit amount. If you have a smart pre-payment meter, a credit should be applied directly to your meter on the first week of each month. If you have a traditional pre-payment meter you should be sent a monthly redeemable voucher or get an automatic credit when you top up at your usual place. If you are in any doubt, contact your supplier for further details.

Residents who pay Octavia for their electricity usage are not covered by this scheme. We are in discussions with suppliers to understand what, if any, support is available and how this will be applied. Once we have this information, we will be in contact with residents it applies to.

Energy Price Guarantee

This scheme limits the price of household gas and electricity, helping to keep the cost down. Residents who are served by heat networks or communal boilers are not covered by this scheme in relation to their gas supply. For these homes, the business which buys the gas from the supplier may be eligible for some price protection through the Energy Bill Relief Scheme and, if so, they are required to pass this on to residents. At present, this scheme is set to last until March 2023.

For some of our homes, we purchase gas and charge residents for the cost. The way we purchase gas means we are protected and although costs may go up, they will be capped.

For certain homes we act as the billing agent but the freeholder, or managing agent, purchases the gas; for other homes, the energy supply and billing is managed completely by the freeholder or managing agent. We are contacting the agents of these schemes to find out if their gas prices will also be protected under the cap.

The schemes are very new, and we are still waiting for fuller details – once we have them, we will provide residents with further updates.

More information about Government help with energy bills and the cost of living can be found at: helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk

Tenant satisfaction measures to give residents a stronger voice

Following on from their Social Housing White Paper, the Government is aiming to transform how social housing is regulated and give residents a much stronger voice in holding their landlords to account.

The Regulator of Social Housing consulted on the first part of this, the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, earlier this year and they have just published the final outcomes of the consultation.

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures will be introduced from April 2023. The measures aim to provide a clear picture of how each landlord is performing and a means of comparing different landlords' performance. They cover things like complaints handling, building safety, management of anti-social behaviour, contribution to the community, repairs and customer service.

The measures will be collected partly through an annual survey of tenants and partly through performance data that landlords are required to submit to the regulator, and they will be published on our website.



More information on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures can be found on the www.gov.uk website

We are already taking steps to adopt these changes. We will be conducting a trial survey before April 2023 to understand tenants' current views on the areas the measures cover, and we will work with Octavia's new residents' panel to ensure we are understanding and addressing the issues raised.

Cladding investigations update

Our in-depth intrusive survey programme on some of our schemes is continuing. Many factors have been considered in carrying out these fire safety checks, including the heights of buildings and the materials used in existing cladding. Unfortunately, this is taking longer than originally envisaged, as we continue

to work with our contractors to ensure all required buildings are surveyed. It is important that we get it right and fully understand what, if any, remedial works are required. This will enable us to create plans for the next steps.

Beware of doorstep scams

We've had reports of people pretending to be from Octavia knocking on people's doors and trying to talk their way into their home.

This could be a scam by criminals who will knock on a door, or ring the bell, posing as tradespeople or housing or council officers, and providing false information to get into homes.

Please be aware that as a rule, we do not visit residents at home for tenancy matters, repairs, gas safety, or utility checks without making an appointment with you first. We will contact you via phone, email or letter and arrange to visit before coming to your home.

All our operators wear a uniform and carry badge identification when they visit, which you should always check. If you are in any doubt about a visitor, don't let them in.

If you have concerns about someone trying to gain access to your home, or you think you might have been a victim of a doorstep scam, contact us on **020 8354 5500**. You can also report a scam online at www.actionfraud.police.uk to help prevent this happening to others.



Autumn stock wanted for our charity shops

We are seeking new seasonal stock for our Octavia charity shops, so if you are having a bit of clear-out of good quality, unwanted items, please consider donating them to one of our stores.

Our stores are stocked with a range of affordable pre-loved clothing and accessories for men and women.

They are an asset to the community and funds raised from them go towards supporting our community projects.

Find your nearest Octavia store:
www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/store-finder

Online parking portal goes live

On 1 October 2022, Octavia moved to a new online portal system for parking. The portal is accessible via a website link and it hosts a range of benefits, including access to the parking service 24/7, 365 days a year.

You are now able to apply, renew and cancel your parking permit online. The portal gives you more control and flexibility in managing your parking.

To renew or apply for a permit, please visit <https://octavia.zatpermit.com/applicant> to sign up to the service. All payments for parking, including visitor parking at applicable schemes, can be made within the portal unless we have agreed a different payment method with you.

All permits are electronic and there is no need to display a permit in your vehicle unless we have agreed to issue you with a display permit.



For more information, please contact the team at parking@octavia.org.uk

Resident app update

As you may know, we recently suspended the service of our app for residents, My Octavia, due to operational difficulties.

While we worked on fixing the problem, we assessed how well the app fits with our ambition to make more of our services accessible to residents online. We concluded that My Octavia is not able to meet our expectations of a reliable and accessible app and so we have decided to no longer operate it.

We apologise for the inconvenience and wish to assure you that the services provided by the app can all be accessed through our contact team:

- By emailing us at info@octavia.org.uk
- By calling a team member on **020 8354 5500** between the hours of 9.30am - 4.30pm Monday to Friday

Personalised rent statements will continue to be posted to all tenants regularly.

Resident data held by the app will be destroyed, according to regulatory guidance. Residents are asked to delete the app from their devices.

Although we can't provide a date for when a replacement app will be available, we are currently developing a new digital strategy covering all aspects of our digital services and we will be involving residents in shaping these new services to ensure it meets your needs. If you would like to be involved with helping shape our digital ambitions, please register your interest by contacting us at be.involved@octavia.org.uk. You can also tell us what you would like from our digital service by taking part in our survey using this link: www.octaviahousing.org.uk/digital-survey

Emily House reception improvements

We are making improvements to our reception at Emily House to make it more accessible and welcoming for visitors. This work will start on 16 January 2023 and take around three weeks to complete. During this time our usual reception services will not be available at Emily House, so please avoid visiting unless your enquiry is urgent. Call us on **020 8354 5500** or email info@octavia.org.uk if you need to speak to us or to request a service. The offices will remain open for anyone seeking emergency assistance.



Looking for new employment?

We work with local partners in the boroughs where we operate to increase the opportunities for residents in search of training to improve their skills, or new employment to increase their income.

Our employment and training team offer one-to-one advice and guidance to help people reach their goals. We can also help with finding volunteering opportunities for people seeking to build on their experience and confidence in the workplace.

One resident, who was recently supported into employment by Octavia together with Westminster Council's employment service, has said the support was life-changing for her and her family.

"Octavia gave me the opportunity to grow and to develop my skillsets," she said. "Working with the team, I felt my confidence grow. They always kept me up to date with opportunities and kept me believing in myself. I am now a pro-active, confident woman who is looking towards the future. Overall, the Octavia Employment Service is a fantastic opportunity for all tenants, as it really does change lives."

Octavia Employment and Training Advisor Kyrsha Haynes said: "Understanding the barriers that people face with employment and seeing them overcome them makes me very happy for them. It is the best part of my job and is essentially what the service is about – giving people the space and opportunity for them to progress and achieve their goals at their own pace."

To contact our Employment and Training team, call Kyrsha Haynes on **07931 170771**.



Westminster Employment Service

Westminster Council has developed strong links with local businesses and can provide good employment opportunities for borough residents through their Westminster Employment Service. Every week the service publishes a jobs bulletin that includes live employment and training opportunities. All the jobs advertised pay above the Living Wage and Westminster residents can apply for any of the jobs they are interested in directly from the bulletin. To sign up for the bulletin, go to <https://bit.ly/3dJ2DpO>

Our performance

To ensure we provide and maintain an excellent service to our customers, we constantly measure our performance in all areas. A summary of our performance at 31 August 2022 can be found in the table below.

Most of our services have performed well and they've met the target set for this year. All emergency repairs were completed within target time. We were below target for

time taken to complete routine repairs and the number of days taken to re-let empty homes. We were just below target for rent collection while General Needs arrears remained above target in August. We responded to **100%** of ASB reports within the target time. We are still working to improve the average time it takes for the Customer Contact team to answer your calls and are looking at how we can improve our performance in this area.

Performance indicator	August 2022	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % of rent due (general needs)	3.84%	3.6%	☹️
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	99.5%	100.3%	😊
Standard voids – average re-let time in days (year to date)	37.58	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	97%	99%	😊
% gas safety checks completed	99.6%	100%	😊
% fire risk assessments completed	99.84%	100%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	100%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (customer contact team)	44	20	☹️
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs lines)	6	20	😊
Average time to respond to complaints (in days)	7.1	10	😊
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from our completed repairs survey)	97%	90%	😊

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.com/complaints

Contact team: 020 8354 5500 | info@octavia.org.uk

www.octaviahousing.org.uk

Octavia, Emily House, 202-208 Kensal Road, London W10 5BN

What do you think of this newsletter?

Let us know at: update@octavia.org.uk