

# FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Annual Review 2022/23





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## FOREWORD FROM OUR CHAIR

### Stephen Jack

I was very proud to be invited to join the Octavia Board as Chair in April 2023. Having been Chair of the Independent Living Fund (a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions, which provided support to more than 40,000 disabled people across the UK during its lifetime) and a trustee of Anchor (England's largest provider of specialist housing and care for people in later life) as well as a current board member of Golden Lane Housing (a supported housing landlord for people with a learning disability), Octavia's mission to ensure happy homes, noble lives and good family life is one I understand and is very close to my heart.

I joined the Board just as the Regulator for Social Housing announced a review of our governance rating. The Board takes the issues raised by the Regulator for Social Housing downgrade of Octavia's governance and financial viability very seriously. As a former CFO and Finance Director, I also understand the challenges in managing the financial position of an organisation such as ours in a difficult economic environment.

The Board has already made a number of changes to the way it exercises oversight of the organisation and is developing detailed plans in order to address the specific weaknesses identified by the Regulator. The Board's strategy and planning are built around a commitment to ensuring that Octavia provides housing and services that both our current and future tenants and communities deserve.

The economic environment and limited options for increasing revenue means that Octavia must evolve, not only to meet economic headwinds, but to meet them in such a way that allows us to maintain and build upon our 158-year legacy of serving London's most important communities.

Over the past year, Octavia has ensured that more than 5,000 households had affordable, safe and secure homes. We have maintained our CQC Good rating across all of our extra care homes. We have reached and exceeded our targets for supporting our communities. We also expanded this support to include 11 brand new supported living homes, introduced more reablement capacity for elderly people coming out of hospital and provided 455 older/disabled people with home handyperson and gardening visits to ensure their homes meet their needs. This is not including our work to support children, young people and families in dealing with the cost of living crisis.

Given the current economic climate, I am proud of the work Octavia has done over the last year to develop much needed new homes, retain some of the most affordable rents in London and provide housing, support and emergency relief to our communities. I would like to thank the professionalism of our Executive team and our hard-working and committed staff, as well as our partners and stakeholders, who have worked so closely with us over the last year and remain key to Octavia's future, as we evolve to meet the challenges we face.

**Stephen Jack**  
Chair - Octavia



## FOREWORD FROM THE CEO

### Sandra Skeete

One of Octavia Hill's founding principles was to make 'homes happy, lives noble and family life good'. Over the last 18 months we have seen the cost of living have a huge impact on our residents, communities and staff. As a founder of the social housing sector, we take Octavia's legacy seriously. Our aim for 2022/23 was to reinvigorate our communities and offer them support and assistance to live comfortably in the nation's capital, during the current cost of living crisis.

Over the course of the year we have supported 4,545 people. We have provided 465 people with emergency food, energy support and grants and provided 136 people with training and employment opportunities, to ensure that they can live well in one of the most expensive cities in the world. We have funded schemes to provide disadvantaged children and young people, or those with special educational needs and disabilities, with weekend and after school clubs, including specialist programmes during school holidays to support working families.

As well as developing new homes, we completed works on 77 of the properties affected by the flash floods in 2021 in North Kensington and Westminster. We also worked with external funders to provide grants to 22 of the affected low-income households. The project has now entered its final phase and we aim to complete this significant programme of works later this year.

2022/23 saw us invest in our communities through one of the toughest times in recent history, with households and many organisations, including ours, feeling the impact of inflation, cost of living and rising costs. Inflation driven wage growth and greater supplier costs also continue to weigh as increasing cost burdens. As a result, as with most UK housing associations, Octavia's budget has been significantly stretched. The impact of rising costs and tight budgets contributed to the Regulator for Social Housing placing Octavia's regulatory grading under review and downgrading Octavia's governance grade from G1 to G3 and its financial viability grade from V2 to V3.

Following the Regulatory regrade, S&P Global Ratings reviewed and lowered Octavia's credit rating. We were pleased that S&P Global acknowledged that we have sufficient liquidity in place, the steps we have taken to reduce costs and that we have retained an investment grade rating.

The end of the year, our 158th year of operation, saw a change in our Board Chair. I thank Sandeep Katwala, who left the role at the end of his six-year term in April 2023, for his leadership and guidance in helping to take Octavia through one of the most challenging periods ever faced by the housing sector. The Board has welcomed our new Chair, Stephen Jack, as we continue with our improvement plans in the confidence that we will deliver on our goals, and further Octavia's legacy and its impact on communities and residents.

**Sandra Skeete**  
CEO - Octavia





## ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The UK economy has been exposed to a number of severe shocks, and although it is now 1.80% larger than at the same time in 2019, rapid and increasingly prolonged inflation, a tight labour market, and continuing supply chain disruption are all increasing costs across the sector.

Social Housing rent caps, which are expected to continue going forward, remain a financial issue. The fact the government regulates and caps general needs social housing rent increases each year presents a noteworthy issue. Should current circumstances regarding below inflation rent cap increases continue, the cap to rental income growth and its juxtaposition against inflation-based spending increases, could prevent the sector from equalising its cost base effectively.

Although the sector faces limitations to revenue growth to allow it to mitigate its rising cost base, it also faces greater uncertainty in terms of incomes from increased arrears, as tenants experience cost of living pressures and real terms falls in incomes.

Whilst The Building Safety Act came into force from April 2022, and is widely welcomed by housing associations including Octavia, improved building safety standards and the new Building Safety Regulator are likely to further impact the sector's profitability and capital expenditure, as a result of modernisation and reporting costs, in the near term.

Mitigating the economic, social, and financial impact on our workforce, as well as the wider impacts of the current environment, will be a significant test as we are reliant on access to skilled workers to deliver development, undertake programmes of major repairs and maintenance, comply with health and safety requirements (including building safety), and deliver key services to tenants. The current tight labour market continues to exacerbate ongoing skills shortages and remains a significant risk in our ability to deliver these programmes and services.

In facing these challenges, we remain fully committed to both our social purpose and in taking the necessary steps to return the organisation to a stronger financial position so that we can continue to meet our strategic goals.

## RATINGS REVIEW

Following Octavia's regrade by the Regulator of Social Housing from G1 to G3 in terms of governance and from V2 to V3 in terms of its financial viability, S&P Global Ratings took the decision to review Octavia's credit rating. The new rating moves the organisation from a BBB+ to BBB credit rating and maintains their Negative Outlook.

As S&P Global have stated, the demand for social housing provision in such expensive areas of London where we operate remains and our strong asset base of over 5,000 homes is therefore well placed. Whilst this update from S&P Global is unfortunate, it not only reflects Octavia's position but also the current overarching economic environment within the housing sector. Given the context, we were pleased that S&P Global declared that Octavia has sufficient liquidity in place and recognised the Group's actions to cut costs.

We accept the Regulator of Social Housing's judgement that we need to improve our financial control through better management of operating costs and delivering efficiency savings, in an environment that remains constrained by available resources and significantly increased uncertainty from the current macroeconomic environment and its cumulative impact over the last 36 months.

A portrait of Octavia Hill, a Victorian philanthropist and social reformer, is the background for the entire page. She is an older woman with light-colored hair, wearing a dark blue dress with a white high-collared blouse. The lighting is soft, highlighting her face and the texture of her clothing.

# FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Providing homes since 1865

## OCTAVIA'S VALUES AND PURPOSE

Octavia was founded by Octavia Hill, the Victorian philanthropist and social reformer, whose ideas formed the basis of all housing associations.

Octavia began her work with the poor of London in the 1860s; she was a pioneer of social housing, a founder of the National Trust and the first clean air campaigner for London. Hill's aim was 'to make homes happy, lives noble and family life good'. She believed that communities are about people, not just the buildings they live in.

At Octavia, we know that Hill's aim is as relevant today as it was 150 years ago. Operating in some of the most expensive parts of the capital, we have built on this legacy through our unique offer that puts people and communities first.

We seek to provide good quality, affordable homes that enable people on lower incomes to live and thrive in the nation's capital, delivering equality through homes, support and opportunity to create vibrant communities and better lives for all.

We believe in supporting the diverse neighbourhoods we serve so that people can live well, be independent, make connections and thrive. As stewards of a legacy dating back to 1865, we aim to continue to build and provide sustainable homes and places for future generations to enjoy and be proud of, for the common good.



# OUR HOMES

Octavia provides good quality, affordable homes for London's diverse communities. We manage 5,378 homes for social housing, supporting a broad range of housing needs.

Our leadership of The Connected Partnership, a strategic development partnership with the Greater London Authority (GLA), Origin Housing and Shepherds Bush Housing Group is on course to deliver 2,039 new homes developed and under construction by 2023. This exceeds our target of 1,408 new homes.

Through our partnership with Barratt Homes and the GLA, we are delivering a new extra care social housing scheme, providing 60 high quality homes for older people. This development began in 2020 and is due to be completed in 2023.

## New build: agency managed supported housing

June 2022 saw the completion and handover of Two Bridges, a specialist supported housing scheme based in Hounslow, providing 11 self-contained homes to adults with learning disabilities, autism, and diverse needs, enabling independent living with on-site support services provided.

## Affordable shared ownership

Our shared ownership properties provide the opportunity for people on lower incomes to buy an affordable home. The average household income for shared ownership buyers in 2022/23 was £53,079 p.a. The average sales value of the homes sold was £389,736. There were several voluntary disposals during the year (five properties sold and six lease extensions), and 19 existing shared ownership homeowners took the opportunity to buy a greater share of their home through staircasing.

## Schemes completed in 2022/23

- William Morris Way/Fulham Riverside, Hammersmith & Fulham - 14 Affordable Rent
- Two Bridges, Hounslow - eight Shared Ownership and 11 Care and Support
- Watkins House, Harrow - 20 Shared Ownership
- Chippenham Gardens, Brent - 22 Social Rent

We sold 19 shared ownership homes in 2022/23 across the boroughs of Brent (two), Hounslow (eight), Harrow (six) and Ealing (three).

## Number of Octavia homes as of 31 March 2023

Type of unit tenure	Ownership/management	Number
General needs:		
- Social	Owned and managed by Octavia	3,271
	Owned by Octavia and managed by others	4
- Affordable	Owned and managed by Octavia	493
Low-cost home ownership	Sold	494
	Unsold	30
Supported housing	Owned and managed by Octavia	229
	Owned by Octavia managed by Others	92
Keyworker accommodation	Owned and managed by Octavia	169
Student accommodation	Owned and managed by Octavia	125
Housing for older people	Owned and managed by Octavia	137
Leaseholder management	Managed by Octavia	315
Market rent	Owned and managed by Octavia	19
Total		5,378

# BUILDING SAFETY AND REPAIRS

Octavia continues to maintain an excellent record, with 99.7% of our homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard.

Keeping homes safe and well maintained is paramount. In 2022/23, 100% of emergency and urgent repairs and 96% of routine repairs were completed within target time. The average pick up speed of calls made to the repair line was 10.49 seconds in 2022/23, down from 13.0 seconds in 2021/22.

## Cyclical and investment works

As part of our cyclical programme in 2022/23 we completed 77 units, focusing on properties in Westminster and North Kensington. Apart from cyclical decoration, the properties also benefitted from works such as roof renewals and sash window refurbishments. We installed new kitchens and bathrooms in 53 of these homes, which will be further added to with a larger planned programme in place for 2023/24.

## Fire safety

Safety remains a top priority and performance was good in this area. At the end of March 2023, 99.21% of our properties had an in-date and compliant Fire Risk Assessment and 100% had an in-date, accredited gas safety certificate.

We continued major planned fire safety works to our homes this year, including carrying out further cladding and external wall inspections in accordance with the latest government guidance.

We identified a number of buildings that required remedial works and have put together a programme of works to complete this over the coming years. Additional fire safety measures, including waking watches and extra alarms in communal areas, are being installed at the buildings affected where required to ensure resident safety.

We are producing bespoke resident engagement strategies for any blocks affected by these measures so residents will be kept informed. We also continue to invest in other areas of fire and building safety, investing circa £3.6m in fire safety during 2022/23.

## Flood risk mitigation

We have continued to work with our insurers and contractors on the properties affected by the flash floods in 2021 in the North Kensington and Westminster areas and have now completed works on 77 properties.

We have worked with a significant number of households to move them, temporarily, into other accommodation and actively sought to support them during this traumatic time. We accommodated individual resident needs and worked with our external funders to provide grants in excess of £10,000 to 22 households who did not have insurance and were living on low incomes. The project has now entered its final phase and we aim to complete works by the end of the 2023 calendar year.

## OUR PERFORMANCE

Performance indicator	2021/22	2022/23	London HouseMark Comparison
Rent arrears as % of rent due	3.34%	3.97%	Upper quartile
Rent collection as % of rent due	100.8	99.5	Upper quartile
Void loss as % of rent due	0.78%	1.2%	Lower quartile
Average voids standard re-let time in days	33.65	34.98	Upper median
Number of ASB cases per 1,000 properties	10	7	Upper quartile
% residents satisfied with last repair	90%	86%	Median
% properties with valid landlord gas safety certificates	99.97%	100%	Upper quartile
% fire risk assessments completed	100%	99.21%	Upper quartile
Average call answering time in seconds	13	10.49	Upper quartile
Average time to respond to a complaint (in working days)	7.5	8.87	Not applicable
% overall resident satisfaction with services	82% (2020)	61%	Lower quartile

We recognise the reduction in our overall resident satisfaction levels. Work has already begun in collaboration with residents to develop and implement an improvement plan.

This involves deep dives into key service areas, including repairs and our complaints process. Additionally, we will be launching our new Resident Charter.



## SUPPORTED HOUSING

During the year Octavia supported residents across directly managed, supported, sheltered and extra care housing units totalling 380 units, with 77 new lets across the year. We continue to work with specialist housing and support providers who manage an additional 71 units across eight schemes.

### **New supported housing in Hounslow for people with learning disabilities and autism**

Octavia worked in close partnership with the London Borough of Hounslow and a specialist support provider, Dimensions, to open Two Bridges, a purpose-built supported housing scheme, in June 2022. The scheme provides 11 self-contained homes to adults with learning disabilities, autism, and diverse needs, enabling independent living with round-the-clock on-site support services provided.

### **Supported housing**

Octavia is committed to developing and maintaining an environment where all members of our community get the support they need and are able to live in the community in a way that works for them and enables them to participate to the fullest.

**In 2022/23 Octavia supported residents across 380 directly managed, supported, sheltered and extra care homes**



# FOR THE COMMON GOOD

## Our community: building on our legacy

### COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

The people we support are frequently at risk of isolation, at risk of having low levels of resilience, confidence and aspirations, or at risk of having limited employability skills.

Octavia's unique community offer and communities strategy is designed to put people first, empowering thousands to live well and connect.

We tackle inequalities by creating opportunities and connection through employment and training advice, outreach and befriending, activities for young and older residents, volunteering, and building financial resilience to help people through the ongoing financial crisis and beyond.

This was our second year of successfully delivering on our 'Building on our Legacy' 2021-2024 Communities Strategy and we exceeded our ambition of supporting at least 4,200 people in engaging a record 4,545 people this year.

However, our work is about far more than numbers: it's about supporting sustainable, long-term impact and outcomes within our community. We aim to build the confidence and the skills of the people we support, helping them to feel more self-assured and less lonely, improving their wellbeing and financial resilience, and empowering them to achieve the outcomes they want.

It is essential to recognise that as an organisation Octavia does not do this in isolation. Helping us to help others is a diverse, talented, dedicated community of volunteers, residents, colleagues, partners and stakeholders who share a common goal: to build and sustain thriving communities in the London boroughs where we work. We are hugely grateful to all those who make continuing with our community projects possible, year after year.



## CHARITY SHOPS

In the 2022/23 financial year, Octavia recruited a new Head of Retail, Angela Marcelle.

Angela is an experienced charity retail and fundraising professional with a wealth of senior leadership experience, including 16 years with Cancer Research UK where she was responsible for more than 100 shops, 3,000 volunteers and 330 paid staff.

Over the course of the year, Angela and her team were able to increase store revenue, including Gift Aid, by 4.80% above forecast, to a figure of £2.4M for the 2022/23 financial year, and achieve a positive net profit contribution of 234% comparative to the 2021/22 financial year.

However, our biggest achievement in relation to the Octavia charity shops has to be the growth in our volunteer numbers, which was driven by direct community engagement. We started the year with 88 retail volunteers and ended the year with 239 volunteers. This is an excellent example of retail working in collaboration with our Volunteering and Communications teams to engage Octavia residents and the wider community to increase shop support, offer skills training, and build confidence within our volunteer network.

Our amazing team of volunteers provided 17,955 hours of their time to support our charity shops on some of the most famous high streets across London. Retail volunteers helped with all aspects of day-to-day shop management, according to their skills and ambition.



**Angela Marcelle**  
Head of Retail - Octavia

“It’s been fantastic to join such a dedicated team to help unleash the potential of Octavia’s charity shops. We are very grateful to all our volunteers for helping make this achievement possible, and to our loyal donors and customers for their continued support.”

## IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING

We’re thrilled that 457 people chose to volunteer with us during 2022/23, helping to support people of all ages and backgrounds affected by unemployment, ill health, social isolation or low incomes across central and west London. Our volunteers are a key part of the vital community work we do and the impact we make.

134 Befrienders gave an hour every single week to befriend lonely older people, empowering them to re-engage with society and become more independent.

In addition, seven people volunteered in our office in a variety of roles including: receptionist, IT assistant and finance assistant. They developed their skills whilst gaining new experience, improving their CVs, and feeling more confident and capable when applying to paid roles.

77 people from 16 different businesses gave back to their local community through volunteering their time at multiple events. They supported mainly older people, at our older people’s Christmas party, afternoon tea and other creative activities at Octavia Extra Care Schemes.

We are consistently working to ensure everyone feels welcome to volunteer with us. In 2022/23, 47% of all our volunteers were from Global Majority backgrounds and 6% from the LGBTQIA+ community. We continue to strive to attract talented, dedicated volunteers from every part of our local communities.





## COMMUNITY AND COST OF LIVING

There are increasing numbers of individuals and families experiencing food scarcity at this uncertain time. During 2022/23, we supported 305 people with emergency food or energy support and secured grants for 160 people on low incomes to purchase essential household items such as fridges, cookers or computer equipment for education, training or work.

205 tenants were helped with money advice and we provided 455 older or disabled people with home handyperson and gardening visits.

Our Employability & Training Coordinator prioritised service users that were experiencing food poverty by identifying food services, grants, and other financial aid offered in various boroughs. They then assisted in making applications on behalf of these residents.

Thanks to the Employability & Training programmes we fund and run, 35 people have now been supported into paid work.

We are extremely grateful to the Friends of Octavia for continuing to generously fund our discretionary grants, emergency food, energy and gardening support. In 2022/23 we supported 160 tenants with Household Grants totalling £46,929, for people living on lower incomes, kindly funded by Friends of Octavia.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the many food support providers who worked in partnership with us to provide invaluable assistance to those in need.

### Money Wise partnership with Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea: helping residents manage in difficult times

The Financial Resilience team worked in collaboration with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Housing & Employment Team to devise a three-day Money Wise workshop with the council, to help residents of the borough learn more about managing their finances. The short course covers topics such as saving techniques, spotting a bargain and understanding energy usage. Attendees could earn up to £30 in shopping vouchers and were provided with a daily hot lunch.

*“An amazing course with time to gain better knowledge and understanding regarding the situation we are dealing with today.”*

*“The knowledge was power, I felt it could be a small book.”*

During our pilot course, 20 tenants who attended strongly agreed that the course was eye opening for them and will change how they manage their money. The course was so successful that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea will be continuing our partnership with multiple course dates throughout 2023/24.

**We supported 160 tenants with Household Grants totalling £46,929, for people living on lower incomes, kindly funded by Friends of Octavia**





## COMMUNITY SAFETY

The environment in which the housing teams are working is becoming ever more challenging. To ensure Octavia is able to support its residents, this year we embedded a new multi-disciplinary team within our community. This is to ensure we have the right skills in place to deal with the complexity of operational case work in areas such as domestic abuse and the impact of anti-social behaviour.

### Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

There were 31 reported cases of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in 2022/23 as defined in our anti-social behaviour policy.

13 cases have been resolved and the remaining are on-going, as they can take time to resolve satisfactorily, depending on the complexity of the case. Three cases involve serious crime and the team is actively working with statutory partners to address these incidents.

The focus is on solutions and keeping people safe through mediation, support and, where needed, management transfer or legal injunctions.

### Domestic abuse (DA)

There were three reported cases of domestic abuse in 2022/23. We recognise that this in no way reflects the actual number of people living with or experiencing domestic abuse, and we understand that for many, reporting and facing up to violence and abuse inflicted by a family member is a brave and painful decision.

We will continue to work to raise awareness amongst our residents around domestic abuse and the various safe reporting channels. To this end we are currently exploring the introduction of a stand-alone Domestic Abuse Policy & Procedure framework to ensure cases of domestic abuse are identified correctly and not blended with anti-social behaviour cases.

Octavia's approach to helping those experiencing domestic abuse is a supportive one. All staff who work directly with our residents receive regular training on identifying domestic abuse and our Housing Services team receive further training and briefings on working with victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

We work collaboratively with 'Standing Together', the leading national charity for tackling domestic abuse. We are also working through an implementation action plan to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation, which will help improve the association's response to domestic abuse.

### Tenancy fraud

In 2022/23 there were three reported cases of tenancy fraud. Two have been closed following a thorough investigation and one is still being investigated.

Octavia is actively tackling tenancy fraud by taking part in a pilot project with the National Fraud Initiative (NFI), organised by the Cabinet Office. In December 2022, we completed a data matching exercise with the NFI. We received results for 711 properties graded as having a very high probability of tenancy fraud. So far, we have reviewed 41 records, with nine matches needing further investigation (two of which have now been closed with no fraud identified).

We continue to work proactively to prevent tenancy fraud by introducing more robust screening measures at tenancy sign ups (such as ensuring adequate photo ID and household details are provided), and staff attending tenancy fraud conferences and training, so they are kept updated on best practice.

### Safeguarding and resident safety

Octavia has actively identified and managed 20 potential safeguarding cases across all areas of its operation in 2022/23. All cases were managed in line with Octavia's safeguarding policy and, where appropriate, in partnership with statutory agencies such as Adult Social Care, Health and the Police.

A large number of concerns raised were regarding residents neglecting themselves, which led to us engaging Adult Social Care or relatives/friends and seeking ways to address the concerns.

We regularly promote safeguarding amongst staff through an ongoing training programme and encourage our residents and contractors to raise any concerns which help to join the dots to identify abuse of children/young people under the age of 18 or adults with care and support needs.

**We regularly promote safeguarding amongst staff through an ongoing training programme and encourage our residents and contractors to raise any concerns**





## SUPPORTING AMBITION

KH is a 20-year-old university student, who has to live in London independently due to a challenging situation at home.

Unfortunately she lost her job when the pub she was working at closed down, and was struggling to pay her bills. However, with the skills she had been developing through our provision, (including directing the inspiring film, Buzz Twice for Yes, which is now a Climate Resource), she was able to take on freelance work as a videographer, developing her portfolio and client base and helping her bridge the gap with her bill payments.

This qualified her to be able to apply successfully for our new Digital Content Creator role, where she has demonstrated fantastic work, inspiring her peers and evolving her work to both manage this role and carry on her freelance work.

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE

After reading the quarterly resident newsletter, our Employability & Training advisor was contacted by a distressed tenant who had concerns about her son's unemployment.

Her son was becoming increasingly frustrated at his lack of employment and it was affecting his mental wellbeing. The Employability & Training advisor was asked to contact him and offer assistance.

Assessing his current job searching methods, we were able to offer new and varied techniques, and suggest roles that he had not previously considered. Three weeks later, we were happy to hear that this young man had secured an apprenticeship with a large national company. While the credit definitely goes to him, we are happy to have helped him on his employment journey.

## EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

We are registered as a Gold Standard organisation as part of Kensington and Chelsea borough's 'Pathways to Work Charter'.

Throughout 2022/23, we supported 136 people with training and employment opportunities; 35 people were successfully recruited into better paid work or new employment.

A total of 17 young people who attended our youth provision were supported into further education or employment this year with organisations including: House Productions, London Screen Academy, and ScreenSkills.

The Communities team have also been working very closely with a variety of local organisations such as Campden Charities, to ensure that we can maximise the support we can deliver.



## SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

We connect with young people creatively. Filmmaking, animation, music videos, music production, game production, performance, photography, art and graphic design as well as engaging organised trips, are just some of the range on offer.

In partnership with specialists and professional experts, our Youth team delivered a popular and inclusive programme. 341 young people regularly attended our weekday and school holiday events, attending a total of 2,609 times across 800+ hours of youth work activities, all free to attend, with most of our sessions including a free healthy hot meal.

### Highlights this year include:

- Four broadcast quality films, written, filmed, acted and edited by young people aged 13-25, covering topics such as gentrification, climate change and domestic abuse against women and girls.
- Working with partners to offer a series of courses and events to enable young people of aged 10 and above to gain experience with animation, filmmaking and 3D game design. This included an animation project with Chelsea Physic Garden, creating two engaging films exploring the 'secret life of plants'.

### Access Digi-Base: for young people with SEND

Access Digi-Base is our specialist weekly group for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). For young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities, this is our creative media project where young people can explore animation, filmmaking, music production, digital arts gaming and much more. 21% of the young people we engaged across all our youth projects in 2022/23 have special educational needs and disabilities.

### School holiday support: trips and workshops

We understand that the school holidays can put an extra financial strain on families feeling the impact of the cost of living, and that making childcare arrangements can be difficult for working families.

Over the Easter, Summer and Half-Term holidays we ran a series of trips to theatres, exhibitions, climbing walls, activity centres, and activities such as Go-Karting and Laser Tag, to provide young people with exciting new experiences and support families through the school holidays.



## CONNECTING YOUNGER PEOPLE

The Octavia Better Lives Community Fund provides grants to fund work with children and young people living in Westminster and/or the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The fund is administered by the Octavia Foundation, on behalf of Octavia. We aim to award grants to a wide range of organisations and projects with a mixture of smaller and larger grants.

We are proud to have reached an important milestone this year as we marked granting almost £500,000 since the Fund opened. This year, Octavia's Better Lives Community Fund supported a further 1,556 younger people through grants to small charities. 12 local youth charities benefitted from a total of £99,999.20 grant funding across a range of areas.

We are very grateful to the Octavia Foundation Trustees for their support with managing the fund.

### The Kongolese centre

The School Break Learning Project (TSBLP) is the continuation of a successful three-year project, solely funded by the Octavia Foundation and Kongolese Trustees. The TSBLP project is an educational and innovative opportunity allowing local refugees and asylum seekers aged 5–18, from African French, Portuguese and Lingala speaking backgrounds, to access and explore local landscapes, water canals, views of local landmarks and historical places. The project runs on Saturdays and Sundays on board the Beauchamp Lodge boat along Paddington Water Canal.

### Hornimans Youth Hub

Hornimans Youth Hub is available for young people aged 10-16, hosting a range of activities including arts and crafts, and cooking. We supported disadvantaged children in our community by funding Hornimans to provide Saturday play sessions, which ran from 11am – 4pm during term time. These included: healthy food and snacks, and a variety of enriching play activities including art, cooking, sports, games, adventure play, music, and cultural and seasonal celebrations.

Children who have communication or cognitive difficulties are supported to attend and participate at their own pace in activities that encourage communicating, playing with others, and developing relationships.

Hornimans measured the impact of our funding support and that of a similar council-funded scheme through staff observations, feedback from parents, numbers of children attending, and their personal circumstances. 84% of children that attend the Hornimans provision are eligible for Free School Meals (Pupil Premium). 18 children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), some of whom are also eligible for Free School Meals, have attended on Saturdays since April 2022.





## THE REED DAY CENTRE

The Reed, our intergenerational community hub in Convent Gardens, London W11, is working towards full capacity since reopening in the wake of the pandemic. With cost of living an ever present factor in our residents' lives, we have been working in partnership with Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) commissioners and social workers to increase the numbers of residents and other people in the community who regularly access support via our Kensington Day Centre (KDC) activities and the lunch club. We are very grateful to the friends of the KDC for their continued support of this valued service.

To assist in the uptake of services, RBKC commissioners have agreed to provide additional transport two days per week to enable residents who live further along the transport route to attend the centre and significantly increase accessibility for these communities.

In addition to the core services provided, the staff at The Reed have worked tirelessly to promote the site as a community hub and to help facilitate workshops and support sessions that can have a direct impact on our residents and the wider community. Most recently RBKC hired the facilities to run Money Wise sessions, to support people with the cost of living and Fit4Life programmes designed for young people aged between 5-11, to learn to cook, take part in structured exercise, and expand their life skills.

We have also been thrilled to welcome a group of older Persian people who meet weekly at The Reed for lunch and to socialise. This has led to them learning line dancing at the centre as well as using it as a community hub.

The Reed continues to be home to our digital youth club, Base, and a number of activities are held on site by Octavia befriending teams. Each of the external activities brings in a revenue stream and we hope to encourage other local groups within the area to take advantage of the facilities.



**Thanks to the hard work of our team, Octavia is working with RBKC commissioners to expand community access to The Reed day centre with more transport options and more services**



# RESIDENT INFLUENCE STRATEGY

As an organisation we have chosen to focus on resident influence, rather than just involvement, to drive change and help us meet our strategic purpose and government expectations.

During 2022/23, we have worked with residents and staff to develop a new Resident Influence Strategy. This is designed to ensure that resident voices are heard at all levels of the organisation, and embedded in decisions we take on the design and delivery of homes and services.

It is important to us that we continue to nurture a strong two-way dialogue with our residents, listen to the things that matter to them and make sure we are taking action to improve. Since launching the strategy, our strategic resident group, Your Voice, has been refreshed to form a resident-only and resident-chaired panel.

Our new panel consists of 13 members across all of our tenure types.

The panel has been consulted on our approach to damp and mould and contributed to the development of our new policy. Panel members also collaborated on reinforcing our new Values and Behaviour Framework by sharing their expectations of excellent customer service, and we have been engaging and involving residents as we develop new and revise existing customer-facing policies and procedures.

We also involved residents in the development of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy.

This year we have held several local events in the communities where we operate, to discuss issues related to residents' homes and estates. We use these events to share key messages on topical issues, such as cost of living, and signpost to support available.

In total, we have engaged with 1,314 residents during 2022/23.

**We have made the process of raising a complaint online significantly more accessible**

## Significant changes to our complaints procedure

We have introduced a new complaints policy and procedure in line with the Housing Ombudsman code for complaints. We have made it easier to make a complaint via a range of channels. We capture and log all complaints received centrally and ensure they are investigated and responded to within our stated time.

We received 224 complaints in 2022/23, compared to 163 in the previous year. The number of complaints received has increased over the last three years by an average of 46%. This increase is due to changes to our complaints procedure, including making the process for residents to raise a complaint online much more accessible. There have also been changes within the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code and an increased level of promotion of residents' right to raise a complaint to landlords from the government and the Ombudsman.

## Key facts and figures

- 83% of complaints this year were resolved by service managers without escalation to Senior Managers (no later than Stage 1), compared to 89% the previous year.
- 49% of complaints were upheld in 2022/23 which is a decrease compared to previous years (7% less than 2021/22), 41% of complaints were not upheld (0% from the previous year), with 10% part upheld (+7% from the previous year).
- This change in outcome is because of improved responses and investigations at Stage 1 and Stage 2 senior manager reviews.
- We received two Housing Ombudsman determinations in 2022/23, with nine last year. There were no cases of service failure or maladministration during the year.
- The average time for a Stage 1 response was 8.87 working days and within target. This is in the top quartile under Housemark benchmarking. In one decision that was reviewed, the Ombudsman complimented Octavia on its responsiveness and case management approach.



## FOR THE COMMON GOOD

### Quality care - supporting those in need

## CARE AND SUPPORT

To build on our proud legacy of reaching those most in need in our communities, we seek to enable older people with care or support needs to thrive in their home, live well and as independently as they can, and have opportunities to connect with others.

Our Care and Support services are respected by the older and vulnerable residents we care for, their families who entrust their care to us, local authorities who commission care services from us, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). All seven extra care schemes are rated 'Good' by the CQC (two have been rated Outstanding for responsiveness).

We believe in helping people live independent lives and aim to improve the latter stages of residents' lives providing the care and support they need in line with their wishes, whether that is through reablement care, quality care facilities, or independent living support.

Over the last year 158 people received 3,015 hours of care per week: and we completed 123 projects to support better lives for people within their communities.



## ADAPTATIONS AND REABLEMENT

### Supporting people to stay independent in their home

The Adaptations team have been partnering with Care and Repair, an organisation based in Hammersmith & Fulham who provide a number of major adaptations across the borough. Since April 2023, we have worked together on 47 major adaptation cases with Care and Repair along with three repairs to existing adaptations.

The team completed a total of 123 projects during this period: 12 major adaptations to homes, 47 minor adaptations, and 64 repairs to adaptations, all of which enable our residents to retain independence in their homes and sustain tenancies in the longer term.

### Supporting people to return home from hospital

Our valued reablement service provides short term accommodation with care for older people to enable them to leave hospital whilst their housing, care and support needs are assessed. This homely environment supports people to reable independence and determine their longer-term needs.

Octavia's James Hill House extra care scheme continues to provide three reablement flats. In the last year, seven people were provided with reablement care here. There are also two extra flats in use for reablement provision at Burgess Fields extra care scheme.

Over the course of the year, five residents either returned home or moved to higher level care services and two became permanent extra care residents.

This service is operated in partnership with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.



## BETTER LIVES PROGRAMME

Our established Better Lives Programme helps prevent older residents living in our communities from feeling isolated and creates volunteering opportunities.

Last year we connected 834 older people with outreach support and community activities, including 265 who received one-to-one and group befriending. This year we have fully returned to face-to-face provision including outreach home assessments, three weekly befriending groups, and one-to-one befriending. We have also kept hybrid components such as welfare calls as inclusive as possible.

77% of people engaging with the Better Lives programme felt they had someone to talk to since joining the service.

**Last year we connected 834 older people with outreach support and community activities, including 265 who received one-to-one and group befriending**

## BETTER LIVES, BETTER ENDINGS

The Better Lives, Better Endings project, delivered in partnership with St Christopher's Hospice, aims to facilitate people reaching the end of their life in their own environment, if this is their wish. It also helps to facilitate conversations around care needs and wishes as needs increase, and endeavours to ensure that circles of support evolve during this time.

The project continues to be embedded into daily practice within our care schemes, aiming to improve the latter stages of residents' lives and provide care in line with their wishes. Conversations around this area have been incorporated into care and support planning to ensure that all residents are offered the opportunity to discuss their preferences and

develop a plan for when it comes to the latter stages of their life. Our colleagues have been trained to ensure we deliver the best outcomes for people.

During the year, we were able to support four people to meet their wish to die at home, surrounded by people they knew.

The scope of our Memorial Garden project has been widened based on the success of the initial scheme and more gardens offer a relaxing space for reflection for residents, visitors, and staff. We have also started to roll out the use of Namaste sessions for residents with higher levels of dementia to stimulate, relax, and ease distress.





## FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Our sustainability - a sustainable future

## SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

Octavia has achieved a 'Gold' accreditation in this year's SHIFT assessment, a sustainability standard specifically for the housing sector, for the fifth year running. This accreditation body measures how we are doing over 22 environmental criteria, including CO2 emissions, water use, waste generation, and response to climate change.

This high ranking is in recognition of our continued commitment to sustainability across the organisation and our prioritisation of providing affordable, energy efficient homes for residents.

The assessment commended our corporate approach to sustainability, recognising how we deliver new homes built to high sustainability standards, and have a target to bring all our existing homes up to a good energy efficient standard by 2025. We are working to achieve this through our rolling programme of cyclical maintenance and repairs, in line with our Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2022-2025.



# SUSTAINABLE HOMES

## Distribution of EPC ratings of existing homes (those completed before the last financial year)

We are committed to providing residents with homes which are efficient, comfortable and affordable. We continue to review the most effective solutions for raising performance levels on those properties with EPC ratings below C.

This year Octavia saw a significant increase to the number of our homes with ratings of EPC C or above equal to 9.98% of our housing stock comparative to 2021/22 reporting. This means 79.05% of our housing stock is now rated EPC C or above. 19.70% of our properties are currently identified as having an EPC rating of D, and just 1.55% of our homes are identified as falling below an EPC D.

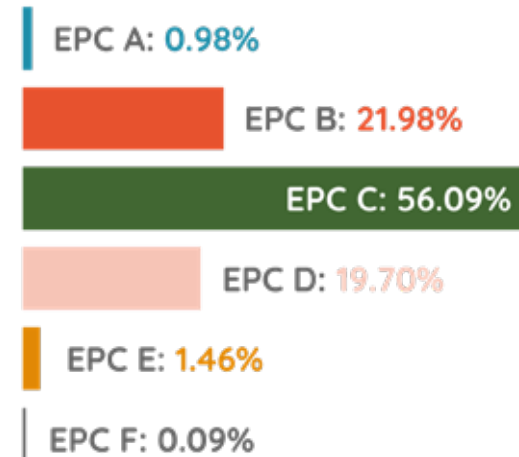
To date, we have not collected data on shared ownership and leaseholder properties and that data is not included here. Our target for inclusion of the data on shared ownership and leaseholder properties is 2024.

In some cases, considerable investment may be required in order to achieve an EPC rating of C (SAP 69). In these cases, an analysis will be undertaken to ensure that higher cost measures

are planned in line with the principles of PAS 2035 and a whole house approach to retrofit, which will help ensure that higher value investments contribute further to our net zero carbon objectives.

Properties falling into this category will generally be improved by 2030, when additional net zero carbon funding provisions have been allowed for within the Financial Plan.

### EPC ratings of homes 2022/23



## Octavia receives £1.5m government funding for warmer homes

Octavia received a grant of £1.5m from the government to make homes warmer for residents and improve energy efficiency. The allocation is part of the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and will be received over two years from April 2023. Funding is targeted at energy-saving improvements to older, poor performing homes and will include measures ranging from insulation upgrades to installing new windows. The improvements will be targeted at older homes where the energy efficiency rating is currently less than EPC C.

The project will address 122 homes with poor thermal performance through a focused programme including cavity roof and underfloor insulation, high heat retention electric storage heaters, ventilation improvements, and replacement windows and doors. It will be undertaken by Octavia together with its asset management partners, Mears.

The improvements programme will enable these homes to achieve at least EPC C, reducing annual energy bills by several hundred pounds a year for each home through reduced energy consumption.





# OUR EMISSIONS

## Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions

Scope 1 covers direct emissions from owned or controlled sources. This includes gas bought for offices, landlord’s gas supply to communal areas, regulated emissions from homes, and business mileage. Emissions are predominately from housing stock emissions that have been estimated using SAP and heating system data.

Scope 2 emissions include electricity bought for offices, and landlord’s electricity supply to communal areas. This also includes transmission and distribution losses.

Scope 3 are Octavia’s indirect supply chain emissions, emissions from leased assets and outsourced activities. This includes fuel for our contracted maintenance fleet. Estimated figures for the embodied carbon in building 100 new homes per year is included. This also includes emissions from resident energy use from our housing (estimated using EPC data and heating system data).

Octavia reports on carbon emissions through annual SHIFT and SECR reporting. Emissions are calculated by consultants from SHIFT during their audit process.

Emissions for the 2022/23 financial year saw a 11.38% reduction comparative to the SHIFT figures for the comparative period in 2021/22.

We have set targets in our Asset Management Strategy 2021-2025, which includes retrofitting across our housing stock, targeting investment towards EPC ratings below C, and undertaking additional energy performance modelling, which will continue to contribute to carbon emission reductions.

Emissions*	2021/22	2022/23
Scope 1:	1,432	942
Scope 2:	601	455
Scope 3:	10,908	10,071
Total:	12,941	11,468

\*Table in tonnes of CO2e. Data provided by SHIFT Environment





# FOR THE COMMON GOOD

## Our people and culture

## CULTURE AND VALUES

Our values: Reliable, Resourceful, Respectful, Responsive (the four Rs), underpin all of the work we do at Octavia.

We believe that success comes not just by 'what we do' but also 'how we do it'.

Octavia is committed to an environment in which everyone is able to do their best work in fulfilling our vision and purpose. This commitment demands continual reassessment of where we are and where we aspire to be and requires constant attention to improve our working culture.

Together we create an environment where our people can bring their authentic selves to work, one where everyone feels welcome, safe, and secure, and where they are empowered to be the best they can be.

Our colleagues are at the heart of serving our customers and delivering our corporate objectives.





## NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Octavia is committed to developing and maintaining a working environment that promotes and protects the health and wellbeing of all colleagues. We offer a range of wellbeing activities and enhanced benefits, including the introduction this year of a new Wellbeing and Employee Assistance Programme provider, Spectrum Life, which will allow us to also offer a significant increase in services and rewards for our colleagues, including:

- High street and online shopping discounts
- Digital gym with live and on demand classes, fitness, and nutrition support
- Mental health e-learning and digital wellbeing seminar series
- Self-guided mindfulness and mediation
- 24/7 access to counsellors (face to face, telephone or online)
- Website and app
- Manager support
- Financial and legal advice

### Emily House refresh

Visitors to Emily House, Octavia's head office, will notice that the reception area has received a refresh, making it more welcoming and comfortable for all visitors. This was part of the office refurbishment, which was the first considerable change since Emily House was built in 2007. The office is now used as a hybrid hub, helping drive forward our goals to be a modern and engaging workplace. Collaboration has been incorporated into the design, allowing our colleagues to come together to best support our residents and customers.

The project incorporated reconfiguring the office, new IT equipment and furniture, and was completed on time and £30,000 under the budget of £350,000.

It provides us with a space that will save Octavia money on external venues in the future, as its design is fit for purpose for large and small gatherings of colleagues.

### Leadership programme

In early 2023 we launched a Leadership Development Programme aimed at supporting all our senior managers across all parts of the organisation, with an overall aim of building confidence, increasing collaboration, and developing a support system.

We want to support the development and increase the number of women in this space and believe our programme will support women's development in senior roles, that will assist in reducing our gender pay gap.

**Emily House is now a multi-functional hybrid hub, that works for all of our staff, visitors, and residents - helping to drive forward our goal to be a modern and engaging workplace where all colleagues can come together**



# STAFF SUPPORT

## Mental health first aiders

At 31 March 2023 Octavia had eight members of staff trained as mental health first aiders. While this number is in line with good practice, we began planning to recruit more in 2023 and have sufficient interest to increase the number to 10 during the current year.

The mental health first aiders met monthly during the year to discuss all aspects of mental health and wellbeing promotion and to provide a support network for each other and staff.

## The Uplift network

Members of Uplift, our Black staff network group, hosted a number of activities in the last year.

These included holding an online event 'Race Equality - Everyone's Business' and 'Launch Time For Change Not Words', which was chaired by the Chairwoman of Uplift in conversation with our CEO Sandra Skeete. Uplift members also hosted an event with the South London Poet Tunde, who read extracts from her poetry.

Uplift has drawn up a three-year plan from 2023 which will involve hosting more live and online events.

## New People Portal

In 2022 we launched our self-service HR information system 'People Portal', which has supported the production of more detailed 'people data'. This will allow us to drill down and gain insights that will not only make the organisation more agile and responsive but will also allow us to better support and interact with our colleagues.



## New equality, diversity and inclusion strategy

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy has been developed taking into account the work of our previous EDI taskforce, together with our commitment to being an anti-racist organisation, which we set out in 2020. Our Corporate, People and Sustainability strategies, data, and feedback from our colleagues, customers and communities have been integral in forming this vision. Best practice, legislative and regulatory requirements, and taking into account the expectations of our partners, also form key inputs into this strategy.

The governance underpinning this strategy and the delivery of its objectives is led by the EDI Steering Committee. This committee is made up of members of our staff networks as well as numerous departments and teams across Octavia, including all our customer facing departments, as well as Policy, Sustainability, the Octavia Foundation, Resident Engagement, Communications, and Health and Safety.

Our EDI strategy is backed up by an EDI action plan, which is about taking real and tangible steps to make Octavia a place where everyone feels like they belong, and supported by learning and development.



## HEALTH AND SAFETY

During 2022/23, Octavia's health and safety team changed the way it provides services to the organisation to empower colleagues to take ownership and manage health and safety themselves and ensure that all colleagues have the knowledge and ability to act in their best interests.

To support this, the team have led on and developed a new SharePoint application within the Octavia network that promotes all aspect of health, safety and wellbeing to facilitate this cultural change. This allows the team to work with management colleagues to empower them to take an active role in managing safety within their teams.

The move to SharePoint and greater accessibility of health and safety information created capacity to further reinforce Octavia's health and safety activities with a programme of field-based audits for all 14 of our charity shops and all of our care schemes, which was completed by March 2023. The team also worked on completing the actions from the first stages of an external critical friend review that has guided the development of a new health and safety strategy, which is due to launch in 2024.



## LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

In 2022 we launched a Learning Management System that holds fantastic learning resources to support the development of our staff.

Although the system is designed to provide access to management and subject matter courses as well as all mandatory learning materials, Octavia has also implemented a number of courses designed to assist colleagues in their day-to-day growth within their roles including courses to support the development of soft skills, communication, problem-solving, time management, decision-making, conflict management, critical thinking, and creativity.

The new learning portal saw our colleagues commit 1,569 learning hours over 82 separate courses including:

- Health and safety
- Data protection
- Cyber security
- Diversity and inclusion
- Health and wellbeing
- Leadership skills
- People management

We actively encourage our staff to upskill at a time that suits them, providing flexibility around day-to-day activities to ensure they have not only the mandatory training they need but also access to the wider support and training they need to grow.

**The new learning portal  
saw our colleagues commit  
1,569 learning hours over 82  
separate courses**





### Cloud technology and hybrid working

As we move towards a new normal in terms of hybrid working, it has been important for us to account for the impact of travel costs on our colleagues' standard of living. As a result, over the past year, our Technology and Data teams have worked incredibly hard to move the organisation to cloud-based infrastructure which has not only increased accessibility, but has also yielded significant achievements in terms of improved efficiency, security, and environmental sustainability.

The successful completion of the cloud migration for our technology infrastructure, applications, print services, and telephony has resulted in significantly enhanced availability, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness of our services.

Another major milestone was the implementation of a 24/7 cyber security service. This has greatly improved our defences against evolving cyber threats, ensuring the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of our systems and data.

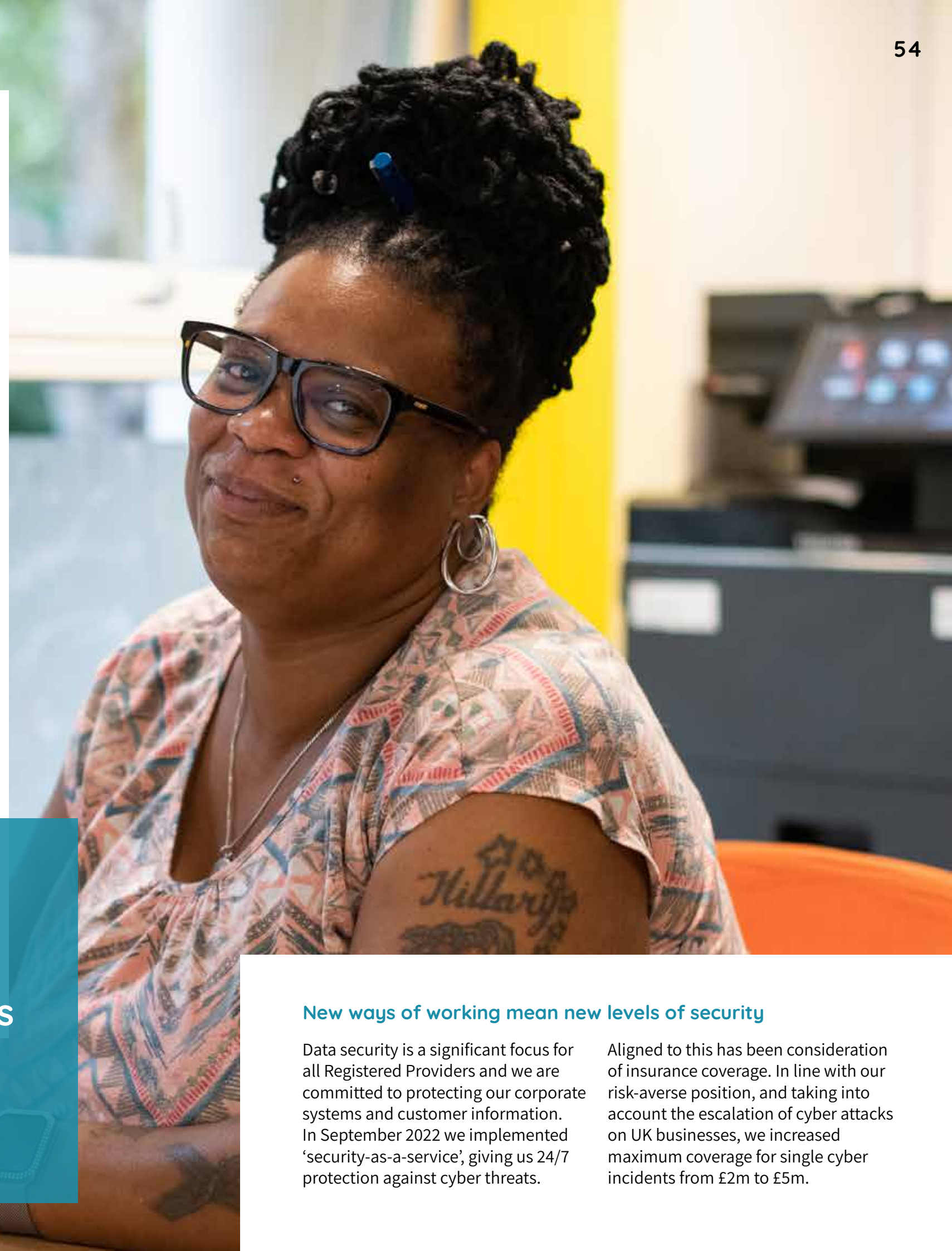
Moving to cloud services has helped us take steps towards greater environmental sustainability along with adopting new printers across all sites, which are more energy-efficient and eco-friendly.

The implementation of higher performance and lower cost network connections for care schemes has improved connectivity and resulted in reduced operational expenses. The successful move to cloud services will enable Octavia to decommission its data centre in our head office at Emily House.

Looking ahead to the coming year, our focus will be on upgrading our Finance, Customer, and Housing Management applications as part of the Octavia Digital Strategy. This strategic development will enable us to better serve our customers, colleagues, partners, and stakeholders. By leveraging advanced technologies, we aim to enhance user experiences, streamline processes, and drive greater efficiencies throughout the organisation. Engagement of a data protection partner will strengthen our data governance practices, ensuring continued compliance with UK GDPR regulations and safeguarding sensitive information.

As we move forward, we are committed to leveraging cloud services, upgrading our core applications, and continuously improving our data governance practices.

**Looking ahead, our focus will be on upgrading our Finance, Customer, and Housing Management applications as part of the Octavia Digital Strategy. This strategic development will enable us to better serve our customers, colleagues, partners, and stakeholders**



### New ways of working mean new levels of security

Data security is a significant focus for all Registered Providers and we are committed to protecting our corporate systems and customer information. In September 2022 we implemented 'security-as-a-service', giving us 24/7 protection against cyber threats.

Aligned to this has been consideration of insurance coverage. In line with our risk-averse position, and taking into account the escalation of cyber attacks on UK businesses, we increased maximum coverage for single cyber incidents from £2m to £5m.





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