

Annual Report for our customers

For the year ended 31 March 2024



*Together with
our communities,
we create affordable
homes and great
neighbourhoods*

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**Eastlight residents,
Christine and Hugh Boyle,
outside their home**

Foreword from Catherine



I'm pleased to introduce this year's Annual Report. I'm Catherine. I'm an Eastlight resident and I'm proud to be Chair of the resident-led Customer Influence Committee (CIC).

As a group, we have overseen this year's report so that it gives Eastlight residents the information that matters about Eastlight Community Homes' activities between 1 April 2023–31 March 2024.

To help us, we surveyed other Eastlight residents on our Active Residents Network about what interests them. Information on repairs, resident involvement, complaints, sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion were requested and can all be found within these pages. This year, housing associations like Eastlight are subject to new regulations called Consumer Standards, and following feedback we've included more info about them.

This year, the CIC has also scrutinised complaints policies and processes to make it easier for you to highlight when something doesn't meet your expectations, and supported with a variety of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives. They work closely with Eastlight so you can live happily and comfortably in your home.

As a resident, you can play a key role in influencing how Eastlight provides its services. So, if you're reading this and thinking that you'd like to get involved and make a lasting difference, then please look out for opportunities on the Eastlight website or contact our Resident Engagement Team. Call **0330 128 0330** or email **community@eastlighthomes.co.uk**

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

The new Consumer Standards – what do they mean for you?

The Social Housing Regulation Act has been introduced to raise standards in the social housing sector and ensure housing providers, like Eastlight, provide you with the services and support you want and need.

There are four Consumer Standards that directly impact you. Here's what you need to know about each of them:



Supporting safe, well-maintained neighbourhoods

The Neighbourhood & Community Standard ensures that we work closely with local authorities and other organisations so you can live safely and comfortably at home. It includes tackling anti-social behaviour, hate crimes and domestic abuse.



Maintaining your home to a high standard

The Safety & Quality Standard means we will keep your homes in good repair and to a high-quality. It focuses on repairs and maintenance, health and safety, and housing adaptations.



Managing your homes

The Tenancy Standard makes sure we allocate homes fairly and ensures tenancies are managed in partnership with you, with advice and assistance.



Being open and honest

The Transparency, Influence & Accountability Standard means we must be open and honest with you and give you clear ways to hold us to account. It also includes the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), which you'll see highlighted throughout the report.



Getting your thoughts

Every month, an organisation called **TLF Research** contacts a sample of Eastlight residents to ask them to complete a survey about our services. It includes a variety of questions, ranging from the type of services you receive, to the way we communicate with you. If you receive a survey, please take the opportunity to share your thoughts and opinions.



Financial management

There are also three Economic Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. These include setting reasonable rents, spending your money wisely and ensuring Eastlight is well managed and financially stable. We are legally required to abide by regulations, and we take these standards very seriously. We will continue to be led by them to ensure we are a housing association that meets your needs.



More information on the Consumer Standards can be found on the Government's website:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-standards-for-landlords



Your home

Ensuring you can live in a safe, warm, dry and good quality home is our top priority.

This year, we invested £13 million to install 82 new bathrooms, 124 kitchens, 603 new boiler and other heating systems within our homes. We also delivered 77 new roofs, installed 565 fire doors, and fitted new windows into 95 homes.

We also helped residents to live independently in their homes by installing over 800 aids and adaptations, which included handrails, shower seats and boards, key safes, raised toilets and level access showers.

Our first-time fix rate remained at 84% this year, however the average waiting time for a scheduled repair is just over 36 days.

We know this is too long, and thanks to your feedback at workshops and support from our CIC, we've introduced our new brand-new Repairs Pledge and Repairs Team patches to reduce this waiting time. These new patches will help us to limit the amount of time our team spends travelling between appointments, and it'll ensure you are met with a familiar face when you need something fixed.

We also launched our Healthy Homes Team last year to support you with damp and mould. The team responded to 1,630 cases, completing all the necessary work within an average of just over 14 days. During these visits, the team checked the level of damp, moisture and humidity in homes before cleaning mould away and completing any necessary on-the-spot repairs.

31,700

Number of
responsive repairs



“

I can't praise the teams enough for my new kitchen and bathroom. I'm so very pleased with it, it's surpassed my expectations. Everyone who came to my home turned up when they said they would, they were all polite and cleaned up after themselves. I couldn't be more grateful.”

Christine Boyle, Eastlight resident

Your safety

Ensuring gas safety and making sure Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) are in-date are also a huge part of keeping you safe. This year, we were able to achieve a statutory compliance rating of 99.9%.

Missing the 100% mark was a result of a Fire Risk Assessment being completed just outside the end of the financial year. Meanwhile, we were unable to access some homes, which led to 17 overdue gas service checks.

We will never cap gas supplies and prevent you from heating your home when we're unable to carry out a gas service check. However, it's very important these checks are carried out, so if you're unsure about the work taking place in your home, please contact us and we will support you.

In 2022, we launched our Sustainability Strategy, which sets out how we will bring all our homes up to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) grade C by 2030. This year, we increased the number of homes that meet EPC C from 68% to 74%.

By improving the energy efficiency of your homes, through adding insulation, installing new boilers and trialling new green technology, you should see an improvement in the costs for heating, hot water and lighting. Reducing your energy bills, alongside reducing carbon emissions, is a key driver for improving our sustainability efforts.

Plus, all the new homes we build have an energy efficiency rating of at least EPC B, as we provide long-lasting and sustainable homes not only for residents today, but for future generations.

1,630

Number of damp and mould cases



99.9%

Percentage of homes compliant with the Decent Homes Standard



“

I was paying £150 per month in electric. But, on top of that, I had oil, which meant that I was spending a phenomenal amount of money. Thanks to Eastlight, I've now got storage batteries and solar panels, and it's saved me a huge amount of money. My electric bill is now about £78 a month.”

Chris Weston, Eastlight resident

Your rent helps us to maintain your homes

We often get asked how and where your rent gets spent. Every £1 is divided across seven categories, including managing, maintaining and improving your homes. See below for the full breakdown on how your rent helps to maintain and improve your homes.





“

We weren't happy with how our kitchen flooring was laid. It took all week for the job to be completed and once it was done, we weren't happy with the standard of work we received. Thankfully, a manager agreed it didn't meet Eastlight's standards, so they removed the work and re-laid the floor. The second chap that completed the work was brilliant, we couldn't fault him. Although we're happy with the work now, it took too long to be completed and impacted how we lived in our home.”

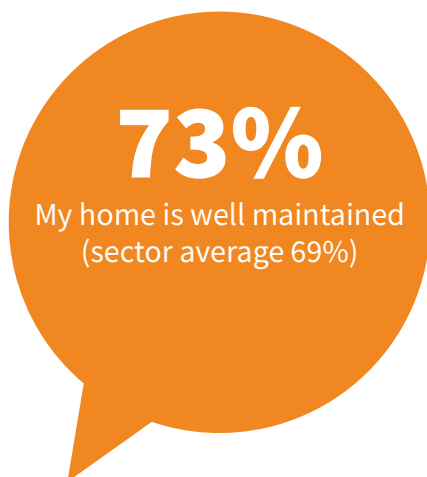
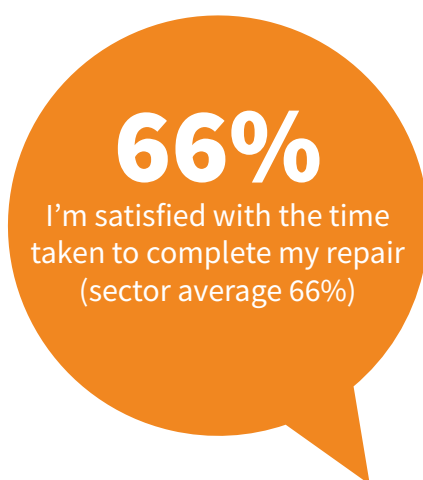
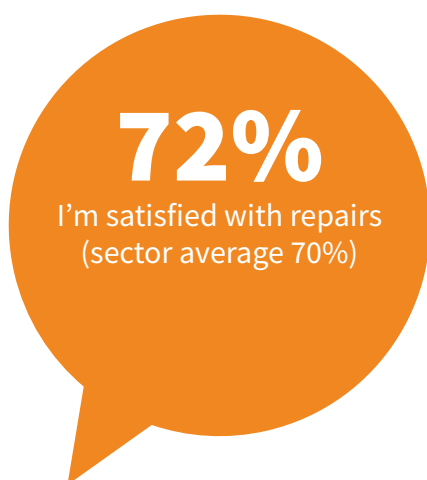
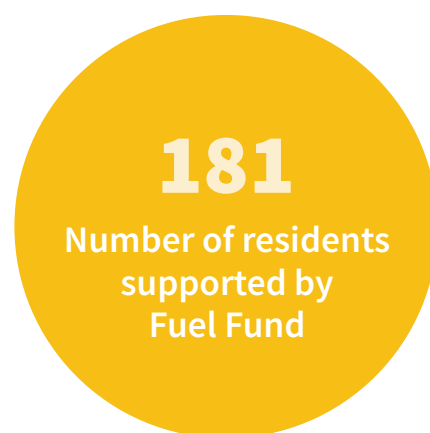
Terry Bridges, Eastlight resident

Helping you to manage your home

Our Tenancy Sustainment Team supported many residents through our £100,000 Tenancy Support Fund. This fund helped to cover the cost of flooring, carpets and purchasing white goods for struggling households, including cookers and washing machines.

We also helped residents to access £60,000 worth of fuel bank vouchers, which enabled 181 eligible and struggling residents to heat their homes throughout December 2023 to March 2024.

Our Welfare Benefits Team offered money and employment advice to more than 1,300 residents, securing over £1m in support for those who needed guidance around claiming benefits.





Your neighbourhood

Creating and maintaining homes and neighbourhoods that you feel safe and proud to live is why we exist.

Our Tenant Satisfaction Measure results show that we're lower than the social housing sector average for work within our neighbourhoods. We're putting plans in place to address and improve these scores which include working in partnership with you to find out how we can enhance your areas together.

Anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse

Our Intervention & Enforcement Team play a very important role in ensuring you can live happily in your home. Last year, we responded to around 1,140 instances of anti-social behaviour (ASB) reported by you and resolved more than 1,100 individual cases.

Last year, we also received seven Hate Crime reports. A 'Hate Crime' is motivated by prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic, like race or sexual orientation. Eastlight House is an official Hate Crime Reporting Centre, so if you need or would like to report a Hate Crime in-person, you can do so at our Braintree office. The address is Eastlight House, Charter Way, Braintree, CM77 8FG.

Throughout the year, we were also able to provide specialist help and resolve 133 cases of domestic abuse. We work closely with external partners and agencies to ensure we offer survivor-led support and guidance. If you're experiencing abuse and want to talk to someone about it, please contact us and we can help you.

1,140

Instances of anti-social behaviour reported by residents

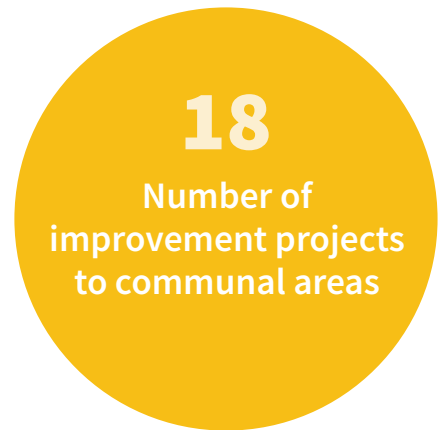
Estates

We know it's important to keep your communities clean and tidy. Last year, our Estates Team carried out 2,456 inspections of communal areas, which resulted in 4,677 actions being raised, including repairs, fly tip clearances and environmental enhancements.

The team made improvements to 18 communal areas, which included new bin stores, recycling facilities, storage solutions, and installing fencing and security. We also repainted the white and yellow line ground markings to increase safety across 22 areas and provided additional disabled parking bays, where possible.

However, we also saw an increase in fly tipping and attended a number of reports of dumped items and waste. It costs between £150 and £2,000 to attend, remove and dispose of discarded items and waste.

If you have a concern about your communal area, please report it to us by calling **0330 128 0330**, or via other ways as detailed on the back of this report.





Grounds Maintenance

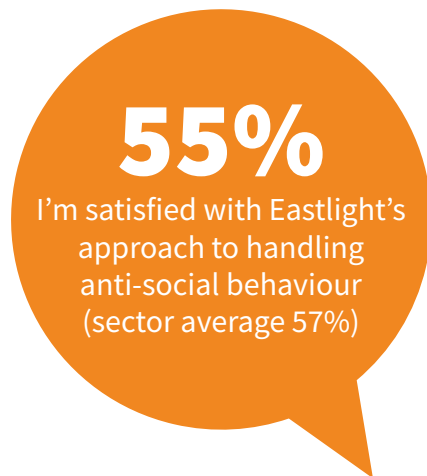
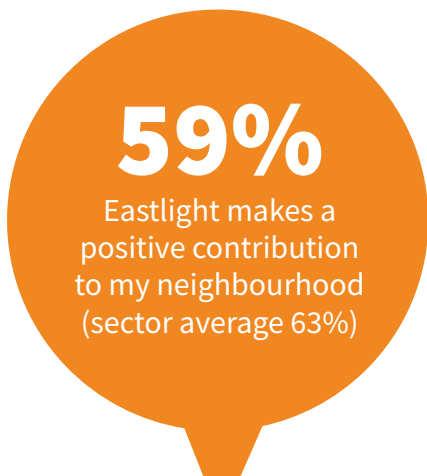
Earlier this year, we worked closely with residents to shape your grounds maintenance offer. Residents contributed to a new-look service, raised concerns about your experiences in your neighbourhoods and debated the kind of service you need and the importance of providing value for money. Thank you to everyone that joined us and shared their thoughts.

Unfortunately, the service provided fell well below your expectations. We responded by replacing the contractor and refunding residents who pay for grounds maintenance via their service charge. We're working to make sure the service is up to scratch in 2025.

Empty homes

Every year, we let hundreds of homes to some of the thousands currently on social housing waiting lists across in Essex and the East of England. In 2023–24, we let 790 homes, but it took us an average of 83 days to re-let homes to people who needed them the most, due to a backlog of empty homes and our in-house capacity.

We know this isn't good enough. That's why we invested in our Voids & Lettings teams to ensure homes are ready to let as soon as possible. While we expect to clear these homes by Autumn 2024, we've already started to see a huge reduction in wait times for new households



60

residential blocks have
trialled a new Bluetooth
door unlocking system



Your influence

No-one knows better what they need to be safe and happy in their home than you. Thank you to the many Eastlight residents who have worked with us to shape the services and experiences that matter to you.

Many of you have got involved with the work we do via a range of different ways:

The Active Residents Network

Almost 130 of you have already joined our Active Residents Network (ARN) since it was created in September 2023. Subscribing to our informative monthly newsletter, taking part in surveys, providing feedback on policies and services, and attending workshops, the ARN play an active role in telling us what you think about the work we do.

The Resident Academy

Our Resident Academy gives you the tools you need to work with us to help shape Eastlight for the better. A total of 33 residents graduated our two Resident Academy boot camps this year.

The Resident Academy Online also gives you the chance to learn more about the social housing sector from the comfort of your own home. With film series ranging from 'Housing in the UK Today' and 'How a Housing Association Works' to a range of interviews with housing professionals from the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman, the videos are your easy go-to for key housing knowledge.

Eastlight Residents Groups

The three Eastlight Residents Groups play a vital role in funding improvements in our local communities. Identifying areas of improvement, the groups collectively decide on where funding can be allocated to ensure a difference is made locally.

After a short hiatus, the Eastlight Residents Groups are reforming and tackling the issues that matter in your neighbourhoods from October 2024.

Want to find out more about how to get involved?

Call us or fill in the short form here:

www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/my-community/resident-involvement/



The Mid Eastlight Residents Group provided a £5,000 grant to John Ray Infants School in Braintree to create a new wellbeing room for its pupils.

We were so proud to fund this incredible initiative that makes such a difference to these children. It's been great working with the staff from the school – they are passionate and care so much about their students.”

Robert Yates, ERG member

24,324
Number of emails received by our Customer Services Team

Communicating with you

We received more than 100,000 phone calls and just under 25,000 emails over the past year, with many of the calls relating to repairs, housing management, rents and property services.

We understand that we sometimes haven't communicated with you as well as we could. We're working on improving this, so you're kept up-to-date and provided with the information you need whenever you contact us, whatever the issue or query.



106,259
Number of calls received by our Customer Services Team

61%
Eastlight listens to my views and acts on them (sector average: 59%)

70%
Eastlight keeps me informed about things that matter to me (sector average: 70%)

78%
Eastlight treats me fairly and with respect (sector average : 76%)



Your feedback

Complaints are your opportunity to highlight when things aren't good enough. We will do everything we can to put things right in a timely manner, and we will take your feedback on board to help evolve our services.

From April 2023 to March 2024, we received 1,016 complaints – 954 of which were Stage 1 complaints, while 62 were escalated to Stage 2.

During this time, we received four Housing Ombudsman determinations, each of which highlighted our service didn't meet your expectations. Since then, we have identified a range of learnings and improvements. These included completing reviews of our policies and processes to ensure we follow best practice and comply with any orders made by the Ombudsman.

At the start of April 2024, we had nine further cases under investigation from the Ombudsman, for which we are still awaiting an outcome. Three of the nine cases were raised in 2022–23, with six raised in 2023–24.

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), published throughout this report, are another way to provide vital feedback on our services. Your feedback via the surveys sent to you via TLF Research is extremely important to us, and we want to improve so we can provide a high-quality service you are happy with.

The sector average for complaint satisfaction currently sits at around 33.8%, and although our scoring is above this at 35.1%, we're still not happy with this figure and we want to improve satisfaction through service improvements.

The Housing Ombudsman sets out clear response timescales for complaints. Our average Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses did not meet the Ombudsman's targets of 10 and 20 working days. However, sometimes we may need to extend the deadline of our response and will agree this with you prior to the extension.

To improve this and ensure we are meeting the Ombudsman's targets, we have empowered our staff to offer compensation more quickly and are raising awareness of the importance of speedy complaint handling. We've also taken on additional temporary resource and are running workshops to address the lessons learned from cases which are addressed by the Ombudsman.

954

Number of Stage 1 complaints





“


I've raised compliments and complaints for Eastlight but there's still some key things they're not quite getting right. Residents need to be treated as individuals and communicated with more transparently, and things just need to get done. Some of us wait too long for things to be sorted, and we're not kept up to date so we have no idea what's going on.”


Denise Saunders, Eastlight resident


Thanks to you! We're changing how we work


- 

You told us: You wanted to be reimbursed for the costs of running temporary heaters quicker.
- 

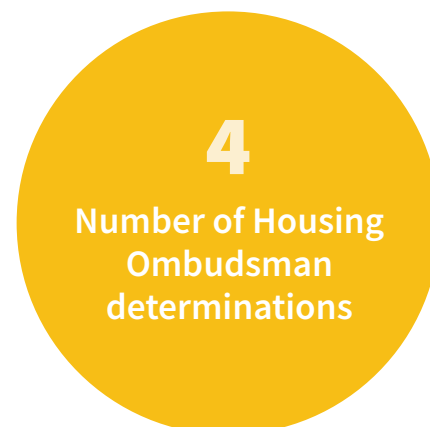
We acted: We've reviewed our Compensation Policy allowing staff to give compensation at an earlier stage. This will help us to reduce complaints and the amount of time you wait for our response on reimbursements.
- 

You told us: You wanted our teams to respond more quickly to repairs and be better at communicating when the repair is more complicated than we first thought.
- 

We acted: We've introduced "local patches" to our Repairs team so our tradespeople can work in specific local areas, rather than travelling across the East daily and getting held up more frequently. This will help us to build better relationships with you, reduce repeat visits and reduce time spent travelling.
- 

You told us: We were taking too long to let out homes, which were sat empty.
- 

We acted: We've increased the number of staff in our Lettings Team and have introduced in-person viewings and end-of-tenancy calls to improve your experience with us.





You should know

Building more homes

At the end of March 2024, Eastlight owns and manages 13,500 homes across the East of England.

Over the past year, we built 417 new homes – 275 for affordable rent and 142 for shared ownership. We were unable to build homes for social rent this year, but this is something we remain committed to doing. We also hit a huge milestone this year, as we celebrated building our 1,000th new home – a wheelchair-accessible bungalow, located in Halstead.

Since the formation of Eastlight in 2020, we've built 1,208 homes, and we plan to build a further 263 homes during the coming year.



263

Number of homes we aim to build next year



“

We've been on the housing waiting list so long, it's like a weight that's lifted. This home is going to make a huge difference to my life.”

Amanda Hayward, Eastlight Resident

Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) report

Every year, we publish an Environmental, Social & Governance report which reports how we are run, the difference we make in communities and our environmental impact. Investors use it to assess our sustainability and ethical practices.

Here's a quick summary. The full report is available on our website.

We strive to provide homes and services that are environmentally friendly and sustainable in the long-term.

We joined the Smart Heat & Intelligent Energy in Low-income Districts (SHIELD) partnership to trial new technologies in two resident's homes to reduce energy consumption and improve environmental performance. We hope to introduce this technology in more homes this year.

Thanks to a successful trial in 2022, we are continuing to explore the use of electric vehicles in our operations and developing a plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions when travelling to and from your homes on repairs and other visits.

Being a socially responsible housing association means we support residents and communities in ways that matter to you.

We supported local communities and charities with our Braintree District and Eastlight Community Fund in partnership with Braintree District Council. This year, the fund supported ten local organisations and charities across the East with a total of £95,275. The panel deciding where the money goes includes members of our Board and CIC, and an Eastlight resident.

Strong governance underpins Eastlight's strategic direction.

We strive to ensure that our Board & Committee Members are reflective of the communities in which we operate, and that equality, diversity and inclusion is central to what we set out to achieve.



£95,275

awarded to local
businesses, charities
and community groups



50
more homes could
benefit from new
sustainable technology
if trial is successful

Being inclusive

EastPride

Our LGBTQIA+ networking group took part in a Pride tour this year across the East of England, and spoke to numerous LGBTQIA+ residents about housing options and why being an inclusive housing association helps people to feel safer in their own homes.

Purple

We're honoured to be the Housing Sector Lead and Founding Partner of disability organisation, Purple, as we continue our efforts to improve the disabled customer experience for residents, colleagues and partners.

Women in Trades

We're combating the gender imbalance in trade-based careers. We currently have three women in our Home Solutions Team who are working to become either a qualified Painter and Decorator or a qualified Plumber. One of our trainees, Kristine Rowley, recently won the runner-up prize in the Suffolk Joint Construction Committee's Business Apprentice of the Year awards due to her outstanding work.

Look out for career opportunities at Eastlight via our website here:

www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/work-for-us/



2

Pride events sponsored by Eastlight including Braintree and Chelmsford



“ I’m very proud of what I’ve achieved throughout my apprenticeship, so I’m thrilled to have been put forward and recognised at these awards. I hope this highlights trades as a great career path for women.”

Kristine Rowley, Eastlight trainee

Eastlight Community Homes

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Braintree
Essex
CM77 8FG

0330 128 0330

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