

Winter 2024

Shine

Your Eastlight residents' magazine

Eastlight
Community Homes

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Martin's mission to help others

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Happy LGBT+ history month!



This February marks LGBT+ History Month, and we're delighted to celebrate the significant milestones achieved by the LGBT+ community.

All our homes and communities should be places where you can freely express your sexual orientation and gender identity without fear or prejudice.

At Eastlight, we're committed to building better relationships with

our LGBT+ residents, and you can find more about what we're doing via our website.

If you need to speak to someone or need support, then please contact us.

i Alternatively, our partners at The OutHouse provide support and information in Essex. Visit: theouthouse.org.uk

Supporting communities

£96,000 has been gifted to 10 fantastic community organisations!

The Braintree District and Eastlight Community Fund, a joint fund between Braintree District Council and Eastlight, has awarded £1 million to local causes since 2015.

Funded organisations include Halstead Community Shed, **Heads2Minds (below left)**, the Salvation Army Housing Association, Home-Start Essex, the Empire Theatre Trust, **Braintree Youth Project Charity (below right)**, Majendie Trinity Explorer, 4th Braintree Scout Group, Tabor Centre and Ferriers Barn.



“A huge difference to my life”

We're excited to have completed our milestone 1000th new home at our fully-affordable Eastlight-led development in Halstead.

The high quality and energy efficient home – a wheelchair accessible bungalow – belongs to the 71-home Mount Hill development.

Amanda Hayward, who moved into the landmark home with her partner and son, said:

“ 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.”

Share your experience



If you're a disabled resident, we would like to hear from you.

We are working with disability organisation Purple to create accessible and sustainable homes and services that residents want and need.

Our Disability Inclusion project aims to understand the challenges faced by Eastlight residents who live with a range of disabilities.

These conversations will then support the vital accessibility

improvements we can make to your homes and services.

If you would like to share your experiences, please register your interest by **Friday, 29 March**.

i Please call us, visit us or email shine@eastlighthomes.co.uk, leaving your name, contact details and preferred method of communication.

ARE YOU ALL IN?

The All In Alliances have been continuing to work their magic in your communities across Braintree, Halstead, Witham and Colchester.

From plans to create a community hub, to improving parking and more, the alliances are making a positive difference to your local areas.

The next meetings are taking place this spring. Join an Alliance near you by visiting: www.weareallin.co.uk/join-all-in

LOTTO WIN

Grow With the Flow, a project created during our All In community programme, recently received £10,000 from the National Lottery Community Fund to continue their mission of tackling period poverty and education in Halstead – well done ladies!

YOUR GAS REPAIRS

Since September 2023, two new gas contractors, Axis Europe and Gas Call, have begun carrying out all gas and oil services and repairs in your homes.

Axis Europe are servicing homes with postcodes beginning with CO, IP and NR. If your postcode begins with CM, CB or SS, then Gas Call Services are supporting you.



Shaping Eastlight for the future

IT'S FAIR TO SAY A LOT HAS
CHANGED SINCE WE CREATED
EASTLIGHT BACK IN 2020.



We've lived through a pandemic. We're living through the cost-of-living crisis and rising homelessness, and new laws governing the homes and services you receive will be introduced this spring.

The world has changed, and we want to change the way we deliver many of the services that matter to you.

In April, we will launch our new Corporate Strategy.

This document, which we'll publish on our website, outlines the direction in which we plan to move during the coming three years, and how we are going to further develop our services to meet your needs.

We've listened to the feedback you have given us – through

the compliments you send, the complaints you've needed to make, and via the surveys we ask you to complete. And we've built the strategy around doing more of what matters most to you: delivering high quality, safe, decent, and well-maintained homes and neighbourhoods.

A big part of this will be the changes we're making through our Better Ways of Working

**The project
focuses on the way
Eastlight's teams
communicate
with you."**

project, which is being led by our Executive Director of Customer Services, Jane Goodley.

The project focuses on the way Eastlight's teams communicate with you, giving you more information about the decisions we make and why we make them.

You should start noticing the changes later this year. In the meantime, watch this space for much more information about our Corporate Strategy and how it will lead to us better meeting your needs.

EPalmer

Emma Palmer
Chief Executive
Eastlight Community Homes

OUR REPAIRS PLEDGE



**THIS PLEDGE SETS OUT THE
REPAIRS SERVICE YOU SHOULD
EXPECT TO RECEIVE FROM
EASTLIGHT COMMUNITY HOMES.**

"It has been created by a group of Eastlight staff and residents, who worked together to identify what matters to you when you need a repair and how we can meet your expectations.

"Our teams are proud of the service we provide. However, we recognise that we don't get it right all of the time.

"Your feedback helps us identify where we should be doing better, so please get in touch if something isn't right."



Daniel Miller
Head of Repairs
& Maintenance



When I request a repair...

- ✓ I will receive a friendly and professional response from Eastlight's Customer Service Team.
- ✓ We will clearly communicate when we will visit your home to carry out the repair.
- ✓ We will explain the priority level of your repair, and if you are not happy we will find an alternative solution, where possible.



On the day of my repair...

- ✓ Eastlight will contact you before your appointment to double check you still require the repair.
- ✓ If we have to postpone your repair, if at all possible we will contact you in advance to rearrange it.
- ✓ Our tradesperson will be polite, professional and complete your repair to a high standard.



When further repairs are required...

- ✓ Eastlight will keep you updated about progress, letting you know as soon as possible when we can complete the repair.
- ✓ If there are issues which will delay your repair, we will keep you posted.
- ✓ Wherever possible, we will send the same tradesperson to carry out the work.



After the repair is completed...

- ✓ Our tradespeople will tidy up after themselves and leave your home in the condition they found it in.
- ✓ If there are any issues with your repair, please let us know and we will investigate and put it right.
- ✓ We will listen to your feedback and use it to make improvements to your repairs service.



YOUR RENT FROM APRIL 2024

WE ARE INCREASING YOUR RENT FROM 1 APRIL 2024.

If you are an Eastlight tenant, your rent will increase by 7.7%. If you're a shared owner, your rent will change based on your lease agreement with Eastlight.

You will soon receive full details of your rent and service charges in your annual rent letter.

We understand that rent rises can be hard to manage, especially when the cost-of-living remains high.

Please contact us if you are struggling or worried about how to pay your rent.

You will not lose your home if you cannot pay your rent, as long as you work with us to manage any arrears you have.

WHY YOUR RENT IS INCREASING

We're a not-for-profit organisation. The rent you pay us helps us provide your services, maintain your homes, and build affordable homes.

Costs have gone up significantly over the last year. For example, the cost of providing buildings insurance to everyone's homes increased by 60% last year – to more than £1 million.



HOW EVERY £1 OF YOUR RENT IS SPENT



WE CAN HELP WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT, BENEFITS ADVICE AND HELP TO MANAGE YOUR RENT IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING.

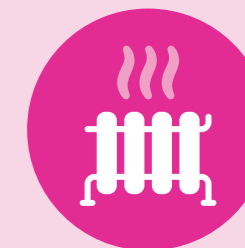
If any of these issues apply to you, please contact us to see how we can help.

Call 0330 128 0330 and press 2 for concerns about the cost-of-living.

For more information about support available, visit this page: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/cost-of-living



“I CAN’T PAY MY RENT”



“I CAN’T HEAT MY HOME”



“I CAN’T AFFORD TO BUY FOOD”



“I DON’T HAVE ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT AT HOME”



YOUR FREE, CONFIDENTIAL HELPLINE

If you are worried about money issues, you can contact your Tenant Support and Wellbeing Service (TSWS). The 24/7 service is free for you to call about anything you are struggling with.

Anything you discuss **DOES NOT** get shared with Eastlight. The service is **100% confidential**.

Call 0330 094 8845, or visit www.tsws-assist.co.uk using these login details:
Username: eastlight
Password: tenant





STAYING SAFE AND WARM



DAMP AND MOULD

If you are experiencing damp or mould in your home, please contact us.

As your landlord, it is our responsibility to make sure you are safe in your home. We will arrange an appointment for our Healthy Homes team to visit you, usually within two weeks.

They will check the levels of damp, moisture and humidity in your home before cleaning affected

areas. They will also complete minor repairs and book any they cannot do on the spot.

If you are struggling to afford heating, they will refer you to our Tenancy Sustainment Team for support.

NEED TO REPORT DAMP OR MOULD?

Contact us or complete a short form on our website: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/my-home/damp-and-mould



BOILER SUPPORT

If your heating system develops a fault, please contact us to repair it.

However, some minor fixes can be completed at home by yourself, if you're comfortable doing them. That way there's no need to wait for us to send someone out to you.

These fixes include:

- Resetting your boiler
- Repressuring your boiler
- Unfreezing outdoor condensate pipes.

Check out our how-to guides here –

www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/my-home/repairs

And remember, if you don't feel comfortable doing these yourself or the fix simply doesn't work, then please contact us. We're here to help.



NEED A HEATING SYSTEM REPAIR?

Call us on **0330 128 0330**



'MY OBSESSION WITH LIVING'

SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS AND LAUGHTER, MARTIN REEVES IS THE LIFE AND SOUL OF BEAUMONT HOUSE, AN EASTLIGHT OLDER PERSONS' SCHEME IN COGGESHALL.

It's difficult to imagine that when he first moved into the scheme a decade ago, he spent the first two years barely speaking to a soul.

Martin was struggling to cope following the suicide of his 19-year-old son in 2012 and his beloved wife's death two years earlier.

After being homeless and spending a year in temporary accommodation, he had moved into Beaumont House with just half a bin bag full of belongings.

But eventually, he began connecting with his neighbours and developed an "obsession with living".

At the same time, Martin began a PhD in Psychology, and wrote a book called: 'Memoirs of a Failed Kamikaze – a survivors guide to suicide'. He regularly supports a range of agencies.

In Martin's words, the book's key message is: "There is light at the end of the tunnel. Once you get out of that hole, you never want to go back."

If you're feeling low or lonely, Martin advises you to talk to someone you know, try something new or simply occupy your mind – anything from cleaning to going for a walk can help.

Martin and a group of his neighbours get together weekly to talk openly about feeling lonely, as well as celebrating special occasions together, such as birthdays and Christmas.

Neighbour Maureen says: "If it wasn't for Martin there's lots of us here who wouldn't be coming out of our front doors. He has really helped me to join in with things – makes me feel part of everything."

When you're a resident for life, it's a godsend – the best thing that ever happened to me."

Martin credits his outlook in part to having a secure tenancy from Eastlight.

He added: "When you're a resident for life, it's a godsend – the best thing that ever happened to me."



CALL OUR FREE HELPLINE

We've funded a new Tenant Support and Wellbeing Service that's free for you to call any time to talk about anything you might be struggling with. **Call 0330 094 8845.**



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I CALL EASTLIGHT WITH AN ISSUE?

RECEIVING AN AVERAGE OF 450 CALLS A DAY, OUR CUSTOMER SERVICES TEAM ARE YOUR FIRST POINT OF CALL WHEN YOU CALL IN TO REPORT AN ISSUE.

You've told us you want to know more about what happens when you've made your request and put the phone down.

Here's one example of the work that goes on behind the scenes to provide you with the services that matter to you – and what happens when something goes wrong.

Hannah calls into our Customer Services Team and speaks to Stephanie, who asks how she can help.

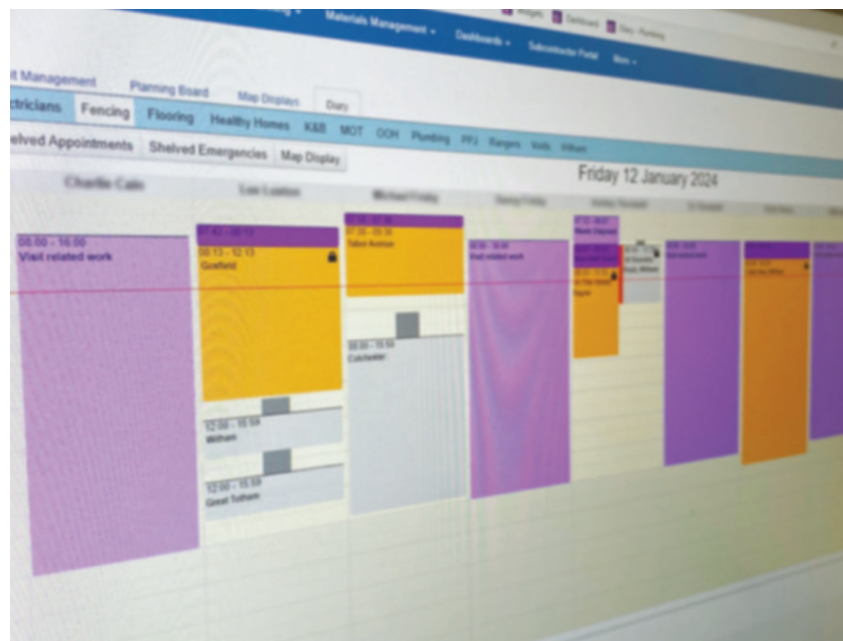
Hannah has an appointment for her fencing to be fixed later in the week, but is unable to be at home to give the fencers access. Hannah asks Stephanie if she can rearrange the appointment.

Stephanie says she's happy to help.



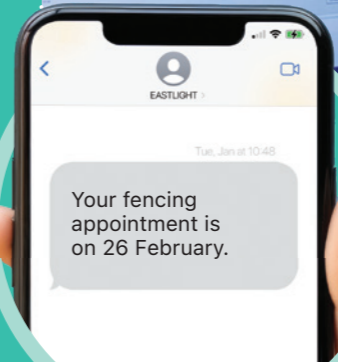
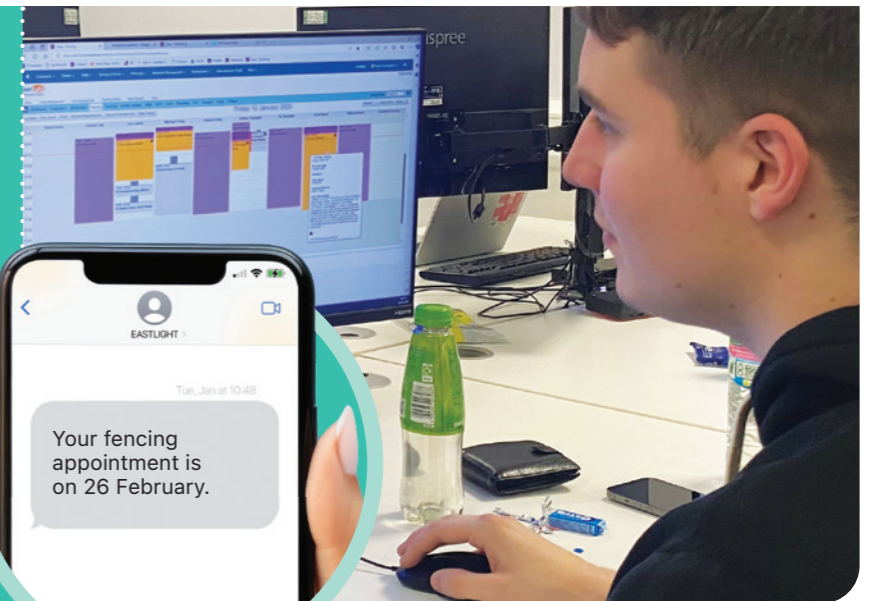
However, looking at fencers' diaries, Stephanie can see there may be a wait. This repair will take two hours, and she can't find this space in their diary over the next month.

Stephanie tells Hannah that she'll need to pass this onto our Repairs Schedulers to rearrange the appointment. Hannah will receive a text when this has been scheduled. Hannah is happy with this and ends the call.



The following day, Ryan, the Repairs Scheduler sees the request. He looks at the fencers' diaries and can see that with a small tweak, he can fit this appointment in for an afternoon next month.

Hannah receives a text with her appointment.



The day of Hannah's appointment, she receives a text informing her that it has been delayed a week. Hannah is annoyed – she's been waiting for this repair for a while.

Hannah rings our Customer Services Team and speaks to Liam, who apologises and investigates.

Liam learns that the fencers had to be sent to an emergency appointment following a storm, and lets Hannah know.

The following week, fencers, Danny and Lee, arrive and fix Hannah's fence.

Hannah rings Customer Services and speaks to Jane. Hannah says that even though it took longer than she'd hoped, the fencers did a really good job and she's really pleased with the repaired fence.



The Resident Academy RETURNS!

YOU KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE WHAT YOU NEED TO BE SAFE AND HAPPY IN YOUR HOME AND YOUR COMMUNITY.

The Resident Academy has been created so you can bring your passion and experience to ensure we deliver the best possible homes and services for you.

Last year, 33 residents took part in one of two Resident Academy boot camps and are already working alongside Eastlight staff to improve your services.

Now you can join them! The Resident Academy returns on 9–10 March 2024.

The free boot camp is an opportunity for 20 residents to join together, learn how Eastlight works and discover how you can make a difference for you, your family, your neighbours and the wider community.

Over two days, you can learn from inspiring speakers, discover how Eastlight works and take on the issues you're passionate about.



Your next step could be a paid role like our resident-led Customer Influence Committee, taking part in community groups such as our All In Alliances and Eastlight Resident Groups, or creating new ways to shape the services you are passionate about.

If you have a desire to learn and a passion to make a difference, then the Resident Academy is for you.

“It has been a really fantastic learning curve. You wouldn't know half of what was going on unless you attended something like this.”

Susan Moody, Resident Academy graduate 2023

APPLY NOW!

When: March 9–10, 2024

Where: Holiday Inn, Eight Ash Green, CO6 3QL

To apply, visit: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/resident-academy

Or call us on 0330 128 0330



KEEPING YOUR ESTATE TIDY

Gould's Landscapes are Eastlight's new grounds maintenance contractor. They're a friendly bunch and you'll see them out and about shortly.

Previously, we provided a different service depending on who your landlord was when Eastlight formed in 2020. We now offer one service to all estates, which aims to offer value for money while meeting the standards you expect.

Our Estate Rangers can also carry out litter picks and leaf clearances on request, and regularly visit areas prone to littering and fly-tipping to combat these issues.

If you're unhappy with the service provided, please let us know as soon as possible, so we can rectify the issue.

IF WE PROVIDE A GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE IN YOUR ESTATE, THEN WATCH OUT FOR SOME NEW FACES MOWING THE LAWN!

YOUR SERVICE



Grass cutting 16 times a year, every 2–3 weeks between March and November. Before cutting, they will clear litter. Afterwards, they will leave grass cuttings and sweep any on footpaths onto the grass.



Hedge cutting twice per year between August and March. We avoid bird nesting season, which is between early spring and late summer.



Shrubs pruned twice a year between August and March, outside of nesting season. Gould's will visit six times a year to hoe, weed, edge, and remove any litter from beds.



Weeds on hard surfaces are treated four times a year between April and October. Afterwards, they will be swept each time to remove dead weeds and moss.



A GARDEN ON YOUR WINDOWSILL



TOP TIPS FROM EASTLIGHT RESIDENT AND HALSTEAD IN BLOOM CHAMP CHRIS HOWARD.

IT MAY NOT FEEL LIKE IT, BUT SPRING IS COMING!

If 2024 is the year you want to create a beautiful garden, whatever space you have, then Eastlight resident Chris Howard is here for you.

Chris, a wheelchair user, plants low-maintenance, ornamental flowers in his garden which can survive on their own. He also invests in easy and cost-effective indoor gardening to satisfy his love of growing.

Winner of Halstead in Bloom's competition for Best Back Garden in 2022 and two runner-up prizes in 2023, we asked Chris to share some of his expertise.

"If you're a beginner, windowsill gardening may feel intimidating," says Chris. "But by choosing the right windowsill and plant, anyone can successfully grow their first garden. Here's some fool-proof steps on how you can grow something easily in your own home."

Proud of your garden creation? Share by emailing shine@eastlighthomes.co.uk



- 1** Check the windowsill to ensure that it's strong and sturdy, and make sure temperatures near the window remain consistently warm to help your plants grow.
- 2** Choose your plants and containers carefully. Leafy greens and herbs are best for windowsills as they're able to adjust to varying sunlight.
- 3** Fill your pots with potting soil and make sure each container has at least one hole for drainage. Don't forget to put a saucer underneath to prevent spillage.
- 4** Once the pots have been filled with soil, transplant the plant or directly sow the seeds into the container. For herbs, keep the seeds roughly 3cm apart and cover with a thin layer of compost. Water the plant well and place it onto the windowsill.
- 5** Watering: for plants, water weekly, or as needed, by checking the upper 2.5 cm of the soil. If the container is dry, gently water the base of each plant until the potting mix is well saturated. Avoid overwatering. For herbs, water every other day to keep the seeds moist.
- 6** Rotate the containers on the windowsill to promote full growth. Within a week you should see your herbs growing. You can start to pick the plants in about six weeks' time, but wait until you see at least six leaves on each plant, otherwise the herb will be unable to keep producing.
- 7** In the warmer months, you can start to grow lettuce, radishes and pea shoots for your summer salads. Good luck!



BLOOMING MARVELLOUS!

A close-knit community of older Eastlight residents are seeing the fruits (and veg) of their labour after uniting to transform the community garden.

Residents of the Woodlands Housing for Older People Scheme, spearheaded by Ian Chapman, 62, and Richard Smith, 79, have been working with Eastlight to create a community allotment.

Working with neighbours on the Braintree estate, they have donated their time, tools, seeds and plants to give the garden a new lease of life, creating a new social space in the process.

With Eastlight's support, the club have refurbished their greenhouse, cleared bags full of weeds and rubbish, removed overgrown bushes, planted vegetables and more.

Estate Safety Officer Helen Mackley is proud of the club's impact. She said: "The communal garden is looking much more cared for, and it is encouraging and rewarding to see residents working together to achieve a common goal.

"They're rightly proud to show their wonderful progress and have been very grateful for any help Eastlight have provided."



BEHIND THE SCENES

In recent months, our dedicated Customer Influence Committee (CIC), led by residents like me, has been actively supporting teams at Eastlight. In doing so, we've ensured that your voice is not just heard but sparks real change.

More exciting changes are afoot this year. Stay tuned for updates!



Craig Clackett,
Eastlight resident and Customer Influence Committee Member

OUR LATEST ACTIVITY INCLUDES:



COMPLAINTS HANDLING

We know that you aren't always happy with the service you receive from Eastlight. We've recently scrutinised Eastlight's complaints process to better understand your experiences, reducing average wait times and ensuring you receive timely updates along the way.



DAMP AND MOULD

To support residents, we've been working with the Assets and new Healthy Homes teams to ensure the organisation is providing essential advice and guidance around damp and mould, offering speedier appointments and critical support for those who need it.



RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

Our Resident Design & Engagement Team has joined forces with the CIC to enhance resident involvement in various task groups, identifying further opportunities for you to get involved in 2024.

Contact us

Call: 0330 128 0330 (local rate)

Text: 07860 024 511

Email: customer.services@eastlighthomes.co.uk

Write to: Eastlight House, Charter Way, Braintree, Essex, CM77 8FG

Visit: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk



facebook.com/eastlighthomes



instagram.com/eastlighthomes



twitter.com/eastlighthomes



linkedin.com/company/eastlight-community-homes-

We really value your comments, compliments and complaints, as they help us to shape the services we provide to you. Please get in touch, any time.

If you need this magazine in a different format or language, please let us know.

