

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Report

For the year ended 31 March 2024



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



**Eastlight resident,
Martin Reeves,
outside his home**

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CEO Foreword



EPalmer

Emma Palmer
Chief Executive Officer
Eastlight Community Homes

In our fourth year as Eastlight Community Homes, I am pleased to see significant improvements made to our operations that have ultimately led us to become a greener and more sustainable organisation, while we – and our customers – have continued to navigate a challenging and complex external environment.

Over the last year, our customers have dealt with everything from high inflation and the rising cost-of-living to soaring energy bills, all in the face of a climate emergency – in the form of significant storms, flooding and the longest heatwave on record.

In addition, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and the Regulator of Social Housing’s Consumer Standards have rightfully given residents greater power to hold their landlords to account for the quality of homes and services they provide. This has placed more pressure on organisations like Eastlight to drive a raft of service-level improvements during a disruptive ecological and economic environment.

However, as the biggest resident-led housing association in the UK, we remain committed to supporting our residents through uncertainty, doing what we can to guarantee they live in safe, affordable and sustainable homes and communities, and ensuring their views and concerns influence our priorities.

This year, we invested £13m into our major capital works programme for the 13,500 homes we own and manage across the East of England. This included enhancing the energy efficiency of around 500 properties, contributing to the 74% of Eastlight homes that have now achieved an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C and above.

We also trialled new technologies in two of our customers’ homes this year, delivering significant reductions in cost and energy consumption. Yet, we recognise that we still have room to grow in this field, learning from like-minded organisations and peers to deliver in the best interests of our customers.

During 2023–24, we delivered 417 new homes for affordable rent (275) and shared ownership (142), each achieving an EPC rating of B and, where possible, built to specifications above building regulations, as outlined in our Development Design Guide.

We celebrate this success, without resting on our laurels. Like other housing associations, we understand the need to strike a better balance on where we spend whilst delivering value for money.



That is why we plan ahead to ensure we are increasingly improving our existing homes while delivering a more balanced, albeit reduced, development programme in the years ahead.

Our in-house team of Sustainability Champions leads the way for Eastlight in progressing our Sustainability Strategy and promoting a greener lifestyle amongst staff and residents. This year, our Champions completed the Carbon Literacy Toolkit® for Social Housing, giving them the knowledge and vocabulary they need to engage with Eastlight stakeholders on climate and housing-related matters.

The introduction of our new Resident Engagement Strategy enables team members to develop more meaningful opportunities for Eastlight residents to shape our future priorities, by supporting local community initiatives, playing a more informed role in holding Eastlight to account, and providing customers with help and assistance as they apply for a role on our Customer Influence Committee.

We strive to put our residents at the centre of our decision-making, and we recognise that we must shift our focus to improving our datasets, engaging residents more frequently, and delivering on our regulatory obligations under the new Consumer Standards, if we are to deliver the kinds of services and quality of communications that our residents expect and need from us.

Put simply, the satisfaction of our residents could be better. Through our Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) results, customers have highlighted the need for us to deliver speedier repairs, rethink our complaints and compensation procedures, be more visible and make a bigger impact within our neighbourhoods.

While we have an action plan in place to enhance our lower-scoring areas, this will be a work-in-progress at Eastlight, requiring the determination and passion of all our team members, not least close monitoring, adequate resource and a sharp and skilled workforce.

Despite the difficult journey ahead, we remain a G1/V1-rated business that is focused on putting our customers first. Through our team members' accomplishments, Eastlight has formed better relationships with all stakeholders, promoting the organisation as a viable and investment-worthy business, contributing to our long-term success and realising our ambitions for the future.

“

New Strategy
enables Eastlight
residents to become
more involved”

Overview

Eastlight Community Homes is pleased to present its fourth annual Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) Report for 2023–24. This report covers our performance based on the latest Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing (SRS).

Learn more about the SRS here: sustainabilityforhousing.org.uk/

Who we are

Eastlight is a vibrant, forward-thinking, resident-led housing association for the East of England. Together, with our residents and communities, we create safe, affordable homes and great neighbourhoods that people are proud to live in.

We own and look after almost 13,500 homes and have ambitious plans to build new sustainable homes that meet local housing need. Our customers pay rents and charges that are below market rates. We put every £1 we receive back into the organisation to support our growth ambition and to improve our homes, services and communities.

We care about our planet. That's why we invest in our existing homes to improve their environmental performance and ensure the new homes and communities we build are designed to be environmentally friendly.

We involve our customers in the day-to-day running of Eastlight, always listening to what matters to them. We use this feedback to influence our services and priorities, and we share our expertise and innovations to inspire others in our region and sector to solve similar challenges.

People who work at Eastlight put residents first. They are committed to doing the right thing to make a positive difference.

13,500

homes owned and
managed in the
East of England

ESG at Eastlight

On 1 April 2024, Eastlight launched its new Corporate Strategy 2024–27, replacing our previous Corporate Strategy 2021–26.

The introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, the Regulator of Social Housing’s Consumer Standards and the ongoing complex economic environment, meant that we needed to set out renewed strategic priorities to better deliver on the changing needs of our customers, people and partners.

Our new Corporate Strategy, approved by our residents, focuses on seven principles, including our goal to be a sustainable business by reducing the environmental impact of our homes.

ESG is central to our decision-making; it aligns with our values and helps us manage risks and impacts. We aim to improve the safety and quality of our homes, while empowering residents to drive change. We set ambitious environmental targets with a strong governance framework to ensure Eastlight’s success.

This year, we developed and implemented new ideas for sustainability to strengthen our business and create value for all stakeholders. We measure our performance and track progress annually.

Our Sustainability Strategy outlines our plans to build and invest in homes ethically and sustainably. We focus on making homes affordable and reducing energy costs, addressing fuel poverty and helping our partners and customers to reduce their carbon footprint.

Meanwhile, our Design Guide emphasises good design for housing development, prioritising the resident experience, community engagement and the local environment.

In line with our good governance principles, we are **Ambitious** in setting and achieving our ESG targets, **Inclusive** in our sustainability efforts, and **Accountable** for our social and ecological impacts.

Eastlight’s ESG Report focuses on our performance for the year ended 31 March 2024, when we were still working against our previous Corporate Strategy 2021–26.



Corporate Strategy
2024–27 launched”



Environmental

The environment is central to Eastlight’s aims and ambitions. We strive to provide homes and services that are environmentally friendly and sustainable in the long-term.

Our New Homes Strategy outlines our aims to build more homes for social and affordable rent and shared ownership. In 2023, we celebrated building 1,000 new affordable homes since we formed in 2020, while ensuring these and future homes are delivered in an environmentally sustainable way.

We established a Sustainability Steering Group in 2021 to guide our journey to becoming a greener, more sustainable business. The group commissioned a carbon audit and developed our Sustainability Strategy, which has ambitious objectives like achieving EPC-C by 2030 and Net Zero Carbon by 2050.

Our Design Guide and strategies, including our Asset Management Strategy, support our efforts to decarbonise homes through a fabric-first approach and using modern methods of construction. Our plans always aim to minimise energy consumption, emissions and waste.

This year, we partnered with Smart Heat & Intelligent Energy in Low-income Districts (SHIELD) to trial new technologies in two of our customers’ homes to reduce energy consumption and improve environmental performance. We aim to continue our partnership with SHIELD and the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) to achieve our Net Zero Carbon and EPC-C goals at pace.

Following a successful trial in 2022, we are exploring electric vehicles in our operations and developing a decarbonisation strategy to reduce overall demand and increase efficiency.

Our team of Sustainability Champions has also driven significant change within Eastlight and our local communities. The Group – which includes an Eastlight resident and Customer Influence Committee Member – completed the Carbon Literacy® Toolkit for Social Housing, which has provided the vocabulary and education needed to communicate climate and housing matters with stakeholders and better deliver innovative solutions.

We seek new ways to improve our environmental efforts at our Head Office (Eastlight House) in Braintree, alongside our Homes Solutions (Repairs & Maintenance) hub at Marks Tey, and within our customers' homes and communities.



1,000
new homes built
since 2020



Social

Social responsibility is central to our values – from providing affordable homes to supporting our residents and communities, in ways that matter to them.

In 2022, we launched the ‘All In’ community incubator programme, offering 20 Essex residents the chance to solve the biggest social issues directly affecting their communities. By April 2024, one project offered peer-to-peer cost-of-living advice, and another helped young people tackle social isolation since lockdown.

This year, we continued to develop our offer to our customers, with the publication of our Resident Engagement Strategy. The purpose of the strategy was to build upon our past work and create more meaningful opportunities for residents to get involved.

Our activities within the year encompassed the following:



All In Alliances – Four alliance groups across Braintree, Colchester, Halstead and Witham meet quarterly to develop their neighbourhoods and grant monetary funding for charities and causes that positively impact on the lives of local residents.



Resident Academy – Our development programme for passionate Eastlight residents provides the knowledge, skills and tools our customers need to help tackle social issues, better understand the social housing sector, and work with us to help shape Eastlight for the better.

Active Residents Network (ARN) – Since September 2023, more than 100 residents have joined the ARN to scrutinise and influence decision-making, such as Eastlight policies and procedures.

Not only this, but we also supported local communities and charities with funding and support, through our Eastlight Residents Group (ERG) and joint fund with Braintree District Council.

SUCCEED@EASTLIGHT

We continued to offer traineeships through our **Succeed at Eastlight** programme, with successful candidates receiving on-the-job experience, a professional qualification and a permanent contract following a values-based recruitment process. This training programme was highly commended at the Affordable Housing Awards 2023.



100
residents have joined
the ARN to scrutinise
and influence
decision-making



Jeff Spencer,
Eastlight resident



Governance

Strong governance underpins Eastlight’s strategic direction. The depth and breadth of our Board Members’ experience helps us define objectives, stay focused and deliver on our ambitions.

Our Board has adopted the National Housing Federation’s (NHF) Code of Governance 2020 and complies with the Regulator of Social Housing’s Regulatory Standards. We retained our G1/V1 rating this year, following an annual stability check in December 2023, the highest rating available for governance and financial viability.

We harness external insight and expertise to support sustainability at Eastlight. To further this aim, we recruited a Committee Member with such expertise and have a Director studying environmental sustainability.

Our Customer Influence Committee (CIC), which includes nine Eastlight residents and chaired by a resident Board Member, oversees the delivery of all customer-facing strategies, policies and operations over key services areas. One CIC member specifically focuses on how we prioritise sustainability and engage residents effectively in our environmental decision-making.

Three resident CIC members now serve on our Board, including a Trainee Board Member.

Having residents hold us to account, particularly around sustainability, ensures we prioritise their views and prepare for changes in regulation and governance, such as the Social Housing (Regulation) Act.

In April 2024, we published our first set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) under the Regulator’s Consumer Standards. Despite low satisfaction across the UK, we are confident in our team’s ability to deliver quality homes and services that residents need now and for generations to come.

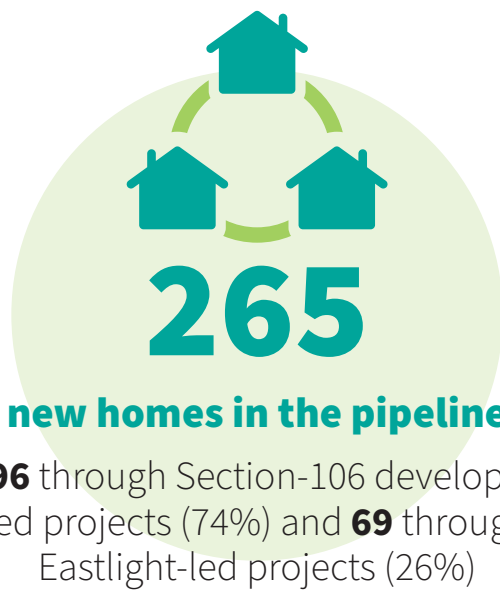
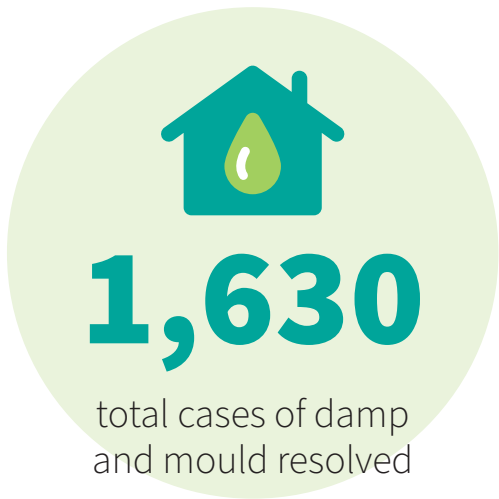
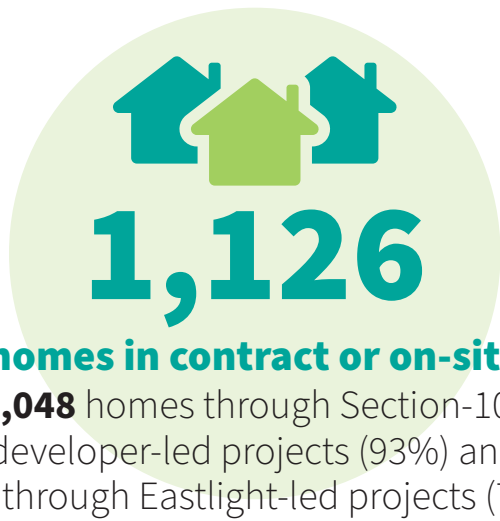
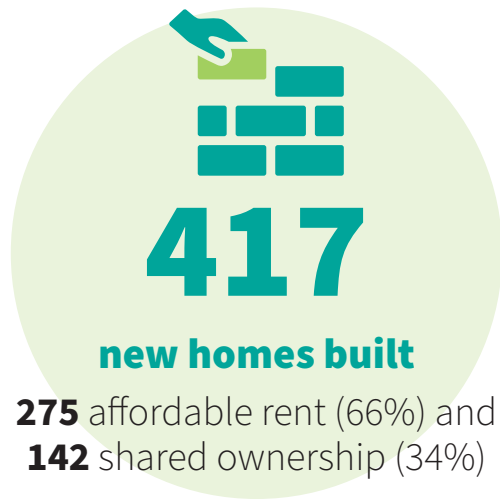


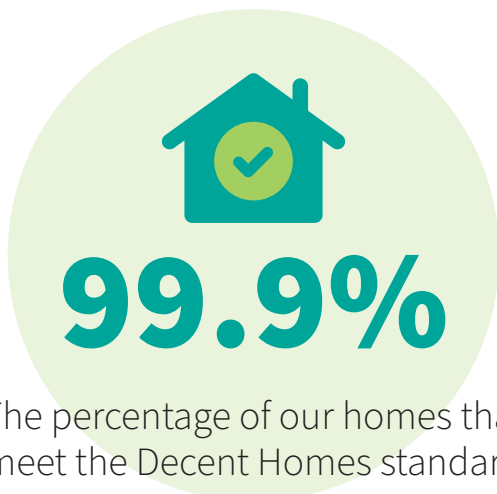
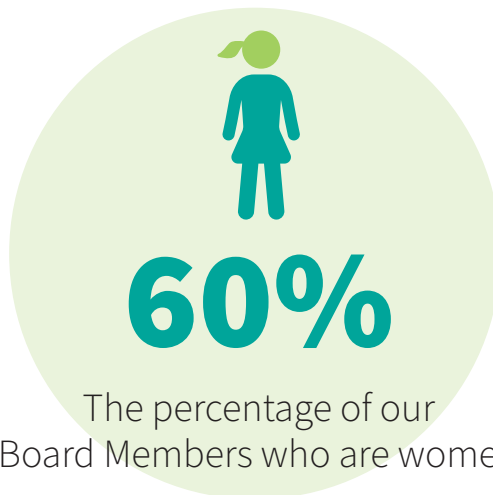
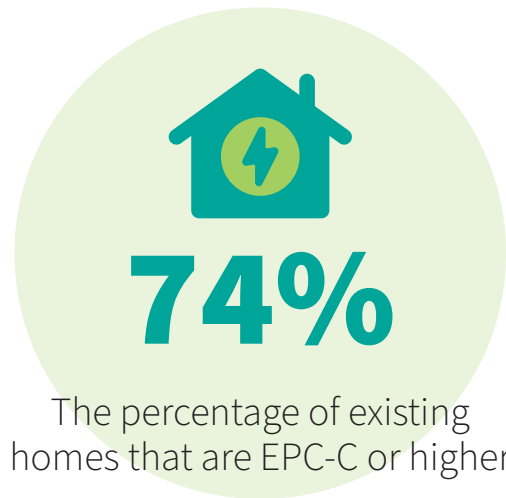
“
Three residents
now sit on our Board”



Rue Garande,
Eastlight resident and
Customer Influence
Committee Member

Eastlight in Numbers





The Sustainability Reporting Standard

The Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing (SRS) was first published in November 2020 after extensive consultation and engagement with the housing and financial sectors.

Its purpose is to provide investors and stakeholders with clear and consistent information about the activities and outcomes of housing providers like Eastlight, as these groups are increasingly interested in ESG-related matters.

In October 2023, the SRS published an updated framework, against which housing providers are now expected to report clearly on the increasing need to ensure security and safety for residents, long-term tenancies and the condition of our homes, the impact of damp and mould on tenants and operations, our annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) results, and our plans to enhance customer satisfaction at Eastlight.

By adopting the SRS, we can track our progress, benchmark ourselves against other housing providers and drive service improvements. It also allows stakeholders, such as suppliers, contractors and lenders, to understand our commitment to ESG practices, providing assurance that we are a credible partner to support their own ambitions for ethical and sustainable outcomes.

We also acknowledge the SRS Annual Review each year to consider how we perform within each criterion compared to other adopters in our sector. The latest SRS Annual Review 2024 can be found here: sustainabilityforhousing.org.uk/sfhs-impact/

Sustainable Development Goals

As set out in the SRS, social housing has positive social and environmental impacts and is recognised as a universal social good within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which were adopted by all United Nations (UN) member states in 2015.

In 2022, Eastlight implemented an ambitious approach to ESG practices in the form of our Sustainability Strategy. This approach was developed based on the findings of the carbon audit conducted by Turner & Townsend, a consultancy business.

As we entered 2023–24, we made sure that all our strategies and activities aligned with and contributed to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in nine key areas, as detailed in this report.

While the other eight goals are still vitally important for the ongoing development and sustainability of people, communities and businesses across the globe, they do not directly influence or impact on our decision-making or directly support Eastlight in achieving its strategic objectives: *Creating affordable homes and great communities that people are proud to live in.*

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)



Reporting Structure

The remainder of this report is structured to provide answers to the 46 questions that sit within the SRS 2.0 framework. This is further split into themes and ESG areas, as illustrated in the table below:

ESG Area	Theme	Criteria
Environmental		
	Climate Change	C1 – C6
	Ecology	C7 – C8
	Resource Management	C9 – C11
Social		
	Affordability & Security	C12 – C16
	Building Safety & Quality	C17 – C19
	Resident Voice	C20 – C22
	Resident Support	C23
	Placemaking	C24
Governance		
	Structure & Governance	C25 – C30
	Board & Trustees	C31 – C38
	Staff Wellbeing	C39 – C44
	Supply Chain	C45 – C46



Environmental

Climate change

C1 Distribution of EPC ratings of existing homes (those completed before the last financial year).

Around 74% (8,507) of our existing homes (already built before the last financial year), for which we have accurate EPC data, were rated EPC-C or higher. This is up from 68% last year. The table below shows the EPC ratings across our existing homes:

EPC Band	Count 2023-24	%
A	16	0%
B	604	6%
C	7887	68%
D	2867	24%
E	190	2%
F	15	0%
(No data)	(282)	-
Total	11,579	100%

C2 Distribution of EPC ratings of new homes (those completed in the last financial year).

All the new Eastlight homes we built in 2023-24 (417) achieved an EPC rating of B.

As per our Sustainability Strategy and Design Guide, all our new homes are designed to meet a minimum specification of EPC-C.

N.B. There is an industry-wide issue in gaining accurate EPC data for new and existing homes from our information systems. We are working to resolve this by analysing new technologies and platforms that will enable us to acquire a more accurate data pool for our entire housing portfolio in future.

C3

Does the housing provider have a Net Zero target and strategy? If so, what is it and when does the housing provider intend to be Net Zero by?

Eastlight's Sustainability Strategy describes in detail our commitment and journey towards achieving EPC-C by 2030 and Net Zero Carbon by 2050. Within which, it explains our aims to ensure that we play an increasingly significant role in addressing the environmental emergency, from meeting our legislative obligations, to improving our homes and local environments – for example, limiting the destruction of local flora and fauna, addressing drought and flooding, and our impact on waste and pollution.

The strategy identifies the environmental impact of building, maintaining and living in one of Eastlight's homes, and it has been developed in agreement with Eastlight residents to ensure that we continue to raise energy efficiency standards, reduce fuel poverty and living costs, improve health and wellbeing, and deliver value for money.

Our main aims are to:

- Build new homes and invest in our existing stock in ways that are kind to the environment and improves energy efficiency for our customers;
- Change how we work so that we minimise the impact of our operations on the environment; and
- Support our customers to reduce their own environmental impact and to run their homes more efficiently.

The Sustainability Strategy works hand-in-hand with our Asset Management Strategy and New Homes Strategy.

The Asset Management Strategy makes it clear that we will invest in our homes by using a 'fabric-first approach' to reduce heating demand and cost for residents, including researching and trialling evolving technology to help us achieve our ambitions at a faster rate. We invest in the green skills and education of our people, equip residents with the technology and knowledge needed to live sustainably, and optimise grant funding opportunities to help us achieve our objectives.

At the same time, our New Homes Strategy identifies the need to build homes that are environmentally sustainable and in ways that meet forthcoming legislation (e.g. the Future Homes Standard). By moving towards a more balanced development programme between developer-led and Eastlight-led schemes, we are able to take greater control over quality and programme, creating more accessible, affordable and sustainable homes and communities.

“

Net Zero Carbon
by 2050”

Our Design Guide, published in September 2022, aims to instil ‘good design’ for all aspects of a development scheme’s inception, design, use and maintenance. At its core, it prioritises the customer experience, and it outlines the positive impact well-designed homes can have on physical and mental health, reducing anti-social behaviour and improving a sense of community.

The Guide is used by the Eastlight team, as well as our consultants and contractors, and is referred to during the inception of new homes, through to their handover and subsequent occupation, management, maintenance and possible adaptation.



“
Design Guide
commits to improve
the customer
experience”



The Eastlight Team
and contractor
Stonebond at Mount
Hill, Halstead (Essex)

C4

What retrofit activities has the housing provider undertaken in the last 12 months in relation to its housing stock? How do these activities align with, and contribute towards, performance against its Net Zero strategy and target?

In 2023–24, we completed a range of retrofitting activities which align with Eastlight’s EPC-C 2030 and Net Zero Carbon 2050 target, in addition to our goals as identified within our Asset Management and Sustainability strategies.

These efforts included:

- Installing 39 solar photovoltaics (PV) systems to our existing homes (some of which include battery storage facilities)
- Completing 77 roof replacements, which included loft insulation being increased to 300mm, and installing correct ventilation measures to ensure air permeability
- Carrying out 439 heating replacements, for more efficient boilers and systems
- Replacing windows on 95 homes, positively contributing to energy performance and EPC ratings.

In the last 12 months, we increased the energy efficiency of 496 homes that have all now achieved EPC-C, 6% more homes than the year before. This means that 74% of our homes are now at EPC-C or above.

The remaining total number of homes in need of retrofitting activities to achieve EPC-C or above is around 3,500 (26% of all Eastlight homes).

In the year, Eastlight partnered with Smart Heat & Intelligent Energy in Low-income Districts (SHIELD), a partnership of organisations – including Essex County Council, Citizens Advice Essex and UK Power Networks, and supported by Ofgem and Innovate UK – that wants to pilot established and new energy technologies in some Eastlight homes to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions for our customers, so they can better afford to heat their homes amid the cost-of-living crisis and mitigate the risk of damp and mould.

As part of the SHIELD project, we have retrofitted and installed new technologies in two semi-detached homes in Twinstead, Essex, reducing overall fuel consumption and costs whilst providing warmer, more sustainable dwellings.

In the homes, air-source heat pumps (ASHP) have been installed, removing existing oil heating systems, to increase efficiency by over 200%. In addition, we have also added solar PV panels and hybrid invertors to both properties alongside new roof replacements and renewed loft insulation, two electric storage batteries, and smart hot water cylinders with smart mobile device applications, saving up to 60% of hot water costs per year.

One property now produces 1.4 tonnes of CO₂ (before the project, it produced 4.9 tonnes of CO₂) achieving EPC-B from D, and the other produces 2.0 tonnes of CO₂ (before the project, it produced 4.4 tonnes of CO₂), achieving EPC-C from D.

“

Technology trial achieves improved energy performance”



Eastlight resident Chris Weston from Twinstead, Essex, describes the benefits of the new energy-saving technologies installed in her home this year.

“ 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 its saved me a huge amount of money. My electric bill is now about £78 a month. Luckily enough, I’ve also got a wood burner, so I don’t have to buy wood or oil anymore.

“Eastlight have been so helpful throughout the process, and I would definitely recommend joining anything that they do.”

The learnings and energy-saving comparisons will go on to inform our approach to adopting similar technologies and techniques for more Eastlight homes as part of our ongoing efforts with SHIELD.

In addition to this, we have sought funding via the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) scheme, which provides a range of energy-saving solutions, including insulation improvements, green heating systems and boiler repairs. With delivery management, customer engagement and property identification completed at zero cost to Eastlight, successful grant funding via the ECO4 will enable us to bring our existing properties up to our target of EPC-C at a faster rate.

C5

Please report the housing provider's Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions total, and per home.

In the year 2023–24, we did not commission a carbon audit to determine our Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions. The last carbon audit Eastlight commissioned was conducted by consultants Turner & Townsend in 2021–22. It was calculated that Eastlight's carbon for the year 2021–22 was 43,175 tCO₂e, with 98% of emissions coming from housing.

The breakdown of our findings can be read in the respective report.

Throughout 2023–24, we have made significant progress towards securing credits via the Carbon Credit scheme to offset our greenhouse gas emissions, and we are currently implementing a new asset management system to acquire and report on the data against our kgCO₂ emissions more frequently and accurately. We expect to be able to do this effectively by 2026.

Sava scores:

- Number of homes assessed: 11,937 of 13,454
- Average SAP (EPC): 71 (EPC-C)
- Average CO₂e per home: 2.5 tonnes (2502kg CO₂ per year)

Eastlight House current energy use:

- Electricity Consumption: 209,813 kWh
- Fossil Fuel Consumption: 48,916 kgCO₂e
- Annual Cost: £133,073.23*
- Solar PV Generation: 12,734.020 kWh

*Our annual costs have risen markedly since last year (2023: £35,056.87). Not only have energy costs continued to rise in the year, but a necessary change in energy supplier led to a contract with significantly higher prices.

However, Eastlight also moved towards 'green' renewable energy from 'brown' fossil fuel energy sources. The shift in supply will enable Eastlight's head office in Braintree (Eastlight House) to run more sustainably and efficiently over the longer term.

“

Funding received
via ECO4”

Current Energy Use of Eastlight House – Located in Braintree, Eastlight House is our main office. The site’s most recent energy audit (2021–22) indicated that Eastlight House is aligned with best practice for:

- **Building fabric** – the building was built to 2010 Building Regulations and is well insulated, with double/triple glazed windows. There are options to reduce heat loss and thermal gain
- **Lighting** – 95% of the lighting is LED and most is controlled by presence sensors
- **On-site generation** – the roof houses 84 solar PV panels, and produced 12,734.020 kWh in 2023–24 – 100% of which is used on site
- **Heating, ventilation and cooling** – heating and hot water is provided by an efficient on-demand system zip boilers. We have three air-source heat pumps (ASHP), which run the ceiling units in the ground-floor café area, first-floor workspaces and top-floor kitchen space of the office; and three ground-source heat pumps (GSHP), which provide heating and cooling to the rest of the building.

C6 **How has the housing provider mapped and assessed the climate risks to its homes and supply chain, such as increased flood, drought and overheating risks? How is the housing provider mitigating these risks?**

We recognise that our new homes projects should be designed to respond to the various ways in which the environment is changing due to global warming. During the design life of a building, temperature increases coupled with improved thermal performance of buildings will naturally lead to an increased risk of overheating. The increased frequency and intensity of storms caused by global warming also brings the risk of surface water flooding and changes the availability of water generally.

Our Design Guide focuses on landscape design and integrating sustainable urban drainage to help mitigate the risk of surface water flooding from increasingly frequent storm events.

Sites should take an innovative and sustainable approach to managing water for the maintenance of landscape proposals to enhance the experience of the landscape and to have as minimal an impact on surrounding infrastructure as possible. Rainwater can be used for several purposes: for resident amenity, as part of a natural landscape strategy, and contributing to landscape maintenance, such as rain gardens. All drainage should be sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) wherever site conditions permit.

Changes to parts of Building Regulations (Part O), approved in June 2022, cover thermal performance, ventilation and address overheating, while reducing overall carbon in use by 31%.



Our Design Guide particularly focuses on the resident perspective, considering their comfort, natural light to circulation areas, preventing overheating in the summer with good ventilation, and air quality.

Layouts in design optimise passive heat gains during the day to reduce heating load requirements at night. Living spaces and bedrooms will be ideally located to minimise overheating and direct sunlight, and windows should be on opposite or adjacent elevations of a room and well-spaced out, limiting an overreliance on mechanical cooling wherever possible.

Reducing east and, in particular, west-facing elevations will also reduce the risk of overheating. The position of buildings on site should also consider overshadowing from adjacent buildings and other objects, such as trees, which can provide seasonal shade. To address overheating, external shading paired with natural cross ventilation is effective, alongside shading devices that can mitigate overheating.

Eastlight is committed to achieving at least a minimum of 25% improvement over and above building regulation requirements for all its future projects, and an ambition for net zero carbon is in operation for all projects.

Within Eastlight's existing homes, we are ever more focused on using tried-and-tested technologies to limit the impact of overheating within our properties. By installing energy efficient thermostats (like Switcher smart devices), we can identify when a specific property is at risk of overheating, or where residents may be susceptible to heat stroke, and intervene to support the resident.

Our ability to monitor the heat in our residents' homes via an asset management dashboard enables Eastlight to ensure that residents can live safely and comfortably in their homes amid the adverse change in our climate.

Ecology

C7

Does the housing provider have a strategy to enhance green space and promote biodiversity on or near homes?

Our Sustainability Strategy focuses on the need for biodiversity and the natural environment across our new and existing homes, operations and for the health and wellbeing of our customers and communities. We aim to protect and enhance natural habitats through the design and construction process in our new homes programme and create communities that support local wildlife in our open, green spaces.

We also maximise sustainable heating at our facilities and seek to protect local wildlife from the impact of our operations. In addition, the Eastlight team and our in-house Sustainability Champions create more awareness for colleagues and customers on ways to support local flora and fauna, and the positive effect biodiversity and nature has on overall health and wellbeing.

“

Development schemes mitigate flooding and overheating”

Underpinning the core design principles in our Design Guide is our focus on the environment, including protecting ecology and providing a net increase in biodiversity. For our new homes, we are seeking to optimise opportunities for tree planting and greenery to significantly improve local natural habitats and wildlife. New projects should carry out an ecological survey to identify early-stage wildlife, and habitat assets landscape proposals should conserve and improve nature and biodiversity opportunities.

All our homes should be designed to take advantage of aspect and views to facilitate an awareness of nature and green space. This enables residents to benefit from biophilia and provides opportunities for exercise, play and communal activities, which leads to residents living healthier lifestyles and creates community cohesion.

Our Mount Hill development is a perfect example of us putting this into practice, with hedgehog highways considered between gardens, bat and bird boxes installed, and a hibernaculum for lizards and reptiles added for the conservation of nearby wildlife. It has also engaged local communities to spruce up the area with planting and flowers, in addition to creating a play area for children and families.

Furthermore, our Whatfield Road development in Elmsett, Ipswich, will be the first to fully meet the specifications as set out within our Design Guide. Upon acquiring the site in 2023–24, the Eastlight Development Team and contractors located great-crested newts, the largest but rarest in the UK. To contribute towards their protection, our team liaised with Natural England to have them rehomed to a more suitable and sheltered habitat, ensuring that local, endangered species can otherwise thrive if not on-site.



“
We protect
local wildlife when
building new homes”



**Mount Hill scheme
in Halstead under
construction**

C8

Does the housing provider have a strategy to identify, manage and reduce pollutants that could cause material harm? If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

Eastlight commissioned Turner & Townsend to conduct a carbon audit in 2021–22, which established the carbon baseline across all areas of our existing homes, new homes and pipeline, providing essential information against which our ongoing and future performance can be measured to manage and reduce pollutants causing harm.

It also identified the various retrofit approaches Eastlight could take to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions across its operations, achieve higher energy efficiency standards and ensure such measures constitute a pathway to achieving Net Zero Carbon by 2050.

The outcome of the audit informed our Sustainability Strategy, which has ambitious objectives, including:

- Reducing CO2, reusing and recycling throughout the overall lifecycle of our homes when developing, maintaining and improving them, through retrofitting and a fabric-first approach;
- Using trialled and tested renewable technologies to reduce the cost-of-living in one of our homes; and
- Reducing our carbon footprint in the running of our workplaces, including what we buy and how we travel (such as our fleet, business travel and employee commute).

Our Sustainability Strategy also recognises the impact of climate change on health and housing. Ninety per cent of people spend their lives indoors and 60% of that time at home. As such, it notes that energy efficiency interventions and minimising the use of pollutants in our homes and operations can improve general respiratory outcomes, promoting a healthier, fulfilling lifestyle.

In March 2024, we officially launched our new local patches for our 60-strong multi-skilled Home Solutions Team. Working in one of four local patches across the East of England (Colchester & The East; Witham & The South; Braintree; and Halstead & The North), this place-based approach came as a direct result of resident feedback.

Not only do the patches aim to improve our visibility and communication with residents, but it also enables our team to reduce their travel time, air pollution and overall carbon emissions.

Internally, we continue to offer our staff a range of benefits that limit the amount of greenhouse gasses that we emit into the environment, such as encouraging car sharing, agile working arrangements and a cycle-to-work scheme for local commuters.

“

Localised repairs service reduces pollution and carbon emissions”

We are currently measuring our performance against these targets in line with our strategies, Design Guide, the Future Homes Standard and Building Regulations. Our Sustainability Champions also support the organisation in measuring impact and advocating for new innovations and ways of working.

Resource Management

C9 Does the housing provider have a strategy to use or increase the use of responsibly sourced materials for all building and repairs works? If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

We recognise that materials are a finite resource. Therefore, all our materials must be robust, fit-for-purpose and with low maintenance (i.e. easily repairable or replaceable) throughout the lifespan of the building or repair works, with easily recyclable contents.

We are committed to development projects that contribute to the circular economy, whereby the role of materials is well considered and responsibly sourced. As noted in our Design Guide, all specifications should now consider the material hierarchy: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Construction materials, systems and internal fittings and finishes of our new homes should come from sustainable sources with low volatile organic compounds (VOC), and either should be recycled themselves or easily recyclable in future, which requires close collaboration with our main contractors. All our materials should support overall building efficiency, with a low carbon footprint that is easily documented and can be demonstrated to have a positive impact. Where possible, we re-use buildings and installations to have a far smaller impact on the environment than building ‘from scratch’.

Within our operations, our Home Solutions Team frequently partners with sustainable suppliers to source the best materials for their work. Our team ensure that all our Planed Square Edge (PSE) timber, plywood and internal doors come from a minimum of 70% Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) products, and that all our roofing insulation is made from 100% recycled polyester.

All our vinyl flooring offcuts are returned to the manufacturer for recycling; in 2023–24, 1.3 tonnes of product was returned to our manufacturers, creating a 4.8 tonne reduction in CO₂-eq (CO₂ equivalent).

Not only are our teams gradually changing some of our cleaning products for more sustainable and ecofriendly options at our Home Solutions (Repairs & Maintenance) hub at Marks Tey, as well as at our head office in Braintree, but they are also ensuring that uniforms and clothing items are increasingly made from organic cotton and recycled materials, partnering with suppliers that offer a clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE) recycling service, where possible.





4.8
tonne reduction
in CO2-eq from
recycling materials



Transport Co-ordinator,
Jess Lear, at our stores
facility at Marks Tey

C10 Does the housing provider have a strategy for waste management incorporating building materials? If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

Our Sustainability Strategy and Design Guide outlines the ways in which Eastlight aims to reduce, reuse and/or recycle (our waste hierarchy) throughout the construction process, by using more sustainable materials and working with partners who are equally committed to ethical building practices and use sustainable procurement principles.

Our new homes encourage and facilitate resident recycling generally and make provisions within the kitchen design, containing external bins or storage where appropriate. We continue to encourage residents to reduce their own personal waste, as we do with our colleagues within our office buildings. We are also committed to taking action when it comes to recycling larger waste items, garden waste and building materials through local recycling networks, sometimes in collaboration with local authorities and external organisations.

We ensure that we are reducing and reusing waste as a valuable resource. Therefore, our developments must in some way contribute to the circular economy through reuse, material selection, recycling and the reduction of waste.

We take the same approach when maintaining and improving our existing homes, and in our operations. We follow the waste hierarchy at both our Eastlight House in Braintree and our Repairs & Maintenance hub at Marks Tey.

Our contractor – Green Recycling – who prioritises waste segregation and zero waste to landfill, frequently measures our joint performance and provides an annual breakdown of waste recycled from our operations and from other organisations. In 2023-24, 77% of all waste through Green Recycling was recycled, with 23% labelled as ‘residual waste’ (non-hazardous industrial waste).

We continually work towards 0% waste going to landfill at our Marks Tey office, with teams segregating a range of items before collection or sending onto a waste recycling centre, including lamps, batteries, plasterboard, oils, paints, wood and general waste. We are also trialling waste collections for our Planned Works Team, reducing our contractors’ collections to provide a more auditable trace of where our waste lands, delivering better waste management in the coming years.



C11 Does the housing provider have a strategy for water management? If so, how does the housing provider target and measure performance?

We strongly believe that water should be prioritised as a valuable resource in the same way as energy and materials.

As described in our Sustainability Strategy and Design Guide, the design of our new developments aims to reduce potable water usage by using certified low-water fixtures, fittings and appliances, as far as is reasonably practicable. Consideration is given to recycling rainwater and grey water wherever possible, from watering gardens and flushing toilets to recycling heat from pre-heated water.

Not only do we seek to reduce water usage, but our designs attempt to optimise water quality and promote the accessibility of water through water use-reducing technologies. We acknowledge water impact throughout our offices and operations, and we share approaches to minimising water usage with our colleagues, customers and communities.

Within our operations, Eastlight House and our office at Marks Tey has installed sensor taps for reducing water overuse for handwashing, added zip taps to our kitchen and facility areas, and we have utilised a rainwater harvesting system for our dual-flush toilets.



“
Water reducing
appliances installed
in offices and
our homes”

→
**Planned Works Manager,
Paul Mitchell, repairing a
leaky tap**



Social

Affordability & Security

C12 For properties that are subject to the rent regulation regime, report against one or more Affordability Metric:

- 1) Rent compared to median Private Rental Sector (PRS) rent across the Local Authority; or
- 2) Rent compared to Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

For each local authority we operate in, we compare the median monthly rent that we charge against the median monthly private rents across all homes in that area. The figures we use for Eastlight’s rents reflect our Statistical Data Return to the Regulator of Social Housing. We obtain the figures for private rents from the Valuation Office Agency’s Private Rental Market Summary Statistics (October 2022 to September 2023).

We also compare our average weekly rents within each local authority area against the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for the same area.

Based on these comparisons, in 2023–24, Eastlight charged rents that were on average 53% of private market rents and 66% of the LHA.

Over the full year, this equated to an effective discount of nearly £65m compared to private market rent levels, or around £5,400 per home per year.

C13 Share and number of existing homes (owned and/or managed) that were completed before the last financial year, allocated to general needs (social rent), intermediate rent, affordable rent, supported housing, housing for older people, low-cost home ownership, care homes, private-rented sector or other.

This table shows the breakdown of Eastlight’s existing homes by housing type (homes that were already complete before the start of the last financial year). Eastlight started with 302 homes (2.5%) more than it had a year earlier.

Classification	2023–24		2022–23	
	Count	%	Count	%
Social rent	8,502	66.1%	8,508	68.4%
Affordable rent	2,620	20.4%	2,347	18.9%
Intermediate rent	77	0.6%	77	0.6%
Housing for older people	637	5.0%	637	5.1%
Low-cost home ownership	863	6.7%	726	5.8%
Supported housing	116	0.9%	116	0.9%
Other	39	0.3%	39	0.3%
Total homes owned and managed	12,854	100.0%	12,450	100.0%

C14 Share and number of new homes (owned and managed) that were completed in the last financial year, allocated to general needs (social rent), intermediate rent, affordable rent, supported housing, housing for older people, low-cost home ownership, care homes, private-rented sector or other.

Eastlight completed 417 new homes in 2023–24, a 29% increase on the 324 we delivered in 2022–23. The table below shows the breakdown of the new homes we delivered during the year.

Classification	2022–24	
	Count	%
Social rent*	0	0.0%
Affordable rent	275	65.9%
Shared ownership	142	34.1%
Total new homes delivered	417	100.0%

*Unfortunately, high interest rates have markedly slowed down our output when delivering more social-rented homes this year. However, like other housing associations, Eastlight remains committed to doing all we can to meet local housing need.

In July 2024, the SRS published its third Annual Review, collating the ESG performance of 79 housing providers and SRS adopters in the UK. Of these providers, only 48% of all new homes built were for social and affordable rent. Whilst we cannot draw conclusions about the social housing sector as a whole, our delivery of affordable rented homes (66%) compares favourably.

C15 How is the housing provider trying to reduce the effect of fuel poverty on its residents?

Eastlight’s Asset Management Strategy works hand-in-hand with our Sustainability Strategy to reduce the effect of fuel poverty on our residents, particularly amid the worst cost-of-living crisis this generation has ever seen.

Fuel poverty is a growing, national challenge which affects a sizable proportion of our customers. Those that live in poorly insulated homes are relying on inefficient heating systems that allow heat to escape and fuel costs to soar. This is often compounded by low household incomes, irregular work and access to Universal Credit.

Our two strategies make it clear that we work on a fabric-first approach. This means we ensure that our homes are properly insulated, and that the money spent by our customers on heating goes further by retaining heat within the home for as long as possible.



We are also improving our EPC-C 2030 and Net Zero Carbon 2050 plans, as well as specification target energy efficient models, i.e. A-rated Windows, A-rated boilers, etc. To help us achieve this, Eastlight partnered with Smart Heat & Intelligent Energy in Low-income Districts (SHIELD) this year to trial new energy technologies and attain funding to insulate and reduce energy consumption for our customers so that they can better afford to heat their homes amid the cost-of-living crisis and mitigate the risk of damp and mould.

As part of the SHIELD project, we are currently trialling new technologies in two of our customers' homes, which include air-source heat pumps (ASHPs), solar PV panels, roof replacements and electric storage batteries. As at 31 March 2024, we had already seen EPC ratings jump from D to B in one customer's home, and D to C in the other. It has also increased the overall energy efficiency in each home by over 200%. Upon completing the trial, we will assess the changes and techniques needed to deploy these technologies into our existing homes, bringing our existing stock up to EPC-C and above.

We have sought funding via the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) scheme, which provides a range of energy and cost-saving solutions to social housing residents, including insulation improvements, green heating systems and boiler repairs. Successful grant funding via the ECO4 will enable us to bring our existing properties up to our target of EPC-C and reduce costs at a much faster rate.

Furthermore, our Design Guide sets out the innovation, technology and new on-site energy storage measures assessed and considered when designing and delivering our new homes programme, which seeks to address and tackle fuel poverty amongst our residents. It also highlights our commitment to address fuel poverty for all tenants by no longer specifying gas for heating or cooking in our homes, irrespective of building regulations.

Throughout 2023–24, many low-income residents required assistance in claiming the benefits they are entitled to and needed extra support around paying their energy bills.

Our Tenancy Sustainment Team reinjected £100,000 into our Tenancy Support Fund for a second year (2023–24), which covers the costs of floorings and carpets, and purchasing of white goods, including cookers and washing machines. In addition, our £60,000 Fuel Fund provided 181 eligible and struggling customers with fuel vouchers so they could heat their homes throughout the 2023–24 winter season.

Our teams also gave employment advice to more than 1,300 customers, securing £1,213,200 for those who needed guidance around claiming benefits, helping to offset the cost-of-living pressure and, with it, rising energy bills.



C16 How does the housing provider provide security of tenure for residents?

Eastlight's Lettings & Allocations Team works in line with our resident-approved policies and procedures when creating a new tenure or managing a tenancy assignment. When creating new tenures, pre-tenure checks are completed to ensure we know as much as possible about the individual circumstances of our residents, so that we can appropriately advise and provide support where required.

During our assured and starter tenures, a Tenancy Co-ordinator will meet and speak directly with the customer to determine whether any additional support is needed for the resident to sustain their tenancy. Similarly, we interact with all customers during the use and occupation of the property, including licencing or during a decant.

If a long-term tenancy or licence cannot legally be granted (for example, if there are significant repairs needed to a home that prevents the resident from living there while these are carried out, or following a death of a tenant where a discretionary agreement has been offered while a new home is found for the customer), then we will meet and speak with the resident to resolve the matter, wherever possible.

A total of 1,174 tenures were created in 2023–24, including those assigned.

The breakdown is as follows:

- 96% (1,131) of homes we let had at least a three-year tenancy agreement*
- 4% (43) of homes we let had less than a three-year tenancy agreement.

*Figure includes leasehold and shared ownership homes (159), long-term 'assured' tenancies (525) and short-term 'starter' tenancies (447).

Just 0.8% of tenancies (99) have tenancy agreements of less than three years. This total does not include leasehold properties and supported or temporary accommodation.

All other 12,738 properties (99.2%) have tenancy agreements of at least three years.

£1.2m

in benefits secured for eligible residents

Building Safety & Quality

C17 Describe the condition of the housing provider’s portfolio, with reference to:

- a) % of homes for which all required gas safety checks have been carried out
- b) % of homes for which all required fire risk assessments have been carried out
- c) % of homes for which all required electrical safety checks have been carried out.

a) Gas Safety

As at 31 March 2024, we achieved a 99.8% gas safety compliance rating. Issues with gaining access resulted in 17 overdue gas servicing checks in the year, with a further seven currently being addressed through our legal process. While we strive to attain 100% compliance with our gas safety checks, we remain fully compliant with our policy and process.

b) Fire Safety

99.8% of our fire risk assessments (FRAs) were in-date. Residents moving into one block at the end of the financial year meant that the final FRA was completed at the beginning of April 2024, which would have seen Eastlight complete 100% of its FRAs.

c) Electrical Safety

100% of our electrical inspections were carried out in the year.

Our overall statutory compliance rating for the year 2023–24 was 99.9%.

Other safety checks and risk assessments carried out in the year to the end of March 2024 are as follows:

- **Asbestos** – 100%. All our properties had at least one asbestos survey in the year
- **Water Safety** – 100%. All our shared water supplies had a valid water risk assessment and, where required, all water monitoring was completed in March 2024
- **Communal Lifts** – 97%. At the end of the year, one passenger lift was non-compliant as a thorough examination had not yet been completed. Investigations in March 2024 revealed issues requiring replacement works to prevent future flooding. The lift was isolated upon the discovery of the problem. No residents within the building are dependent on the lift, and we have communicated frequently with the residents affected. Works have been scheduled at the time of writing this report.



C18 What % of homes meet the national housing quality standard?

By the end of March 2024, Eastlight achieved 99.9% compliance rating with the Decent Homes Standard. The failing 0.1% was due to five stock condition surveys that had unaddressed issues and works left outstanding at the end of the year.

However, in May 2024, we rectified and completed all works that would have had Eastlight achieve 100% compliance with the Decent Homes Standard.

C19 How do you manage and mitigate the risk of damp and mould for your residents?

At a time of high inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, many Eastlight residents are still struggling to heat their homes efficiently and/or need a range of energy efficiency improvement works, which we are increasingly dedicated to tackling head-on. However, these issues combined have left many residents experiencing damp and mould in their home.

Due to this, and following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale, we have had an increase in calls and concerns from residents experiencing damp and mould in their homes in recent years. In 2022–23, our Home Solutions colleagues paused their day jobs so they could help our Assets Team and others within Eastlight to prioritise the significant rise in damp and mould reported to us.

This year, Eastlight put in place an improved damp and mould service so that we were better prepared for the winter of 2023–24 and able to support residents.

In October 2023, our new Healthy Homes Team was formed to proactively support residents where evidence of damp and mould had been identified. Depending on priority, our team visited homes within ten working days to complete and resolve works – checking moisture levels, washing down mould and scheduling any follow-on works – and liaising with other teams and contractors to manage damp and/or mould in future, preventing its return. This included a dedicated Resident Liaison Officer who kept in contact with the customer throughout any ongoing jobs or follow-on works to ensure residents could get the continued help they needed, whether it be to their property, financial aid or other wellbeing support.

By the end of 2024, our teams had responded to a total of 1,630 cases in the year, responding and completing all jobs regarding damp and mould within an average of just over 14 days. We have a plan in place to bring jobs back into the ten-day target range.

“
Healthy Homes
Team created to
support with damp
and mould”

As stated in our Damp & Mould Policy, published in January 2024, this approach has enabled Eastlight to meet the diverse needs of its residents and comply with current and forthcoming legislation, including Awaab’s Law.

In addition to service-level improvements, all employees within Eastlight – regardless of their role – have completed mandatory e-learning training on recognising and reporting damp and mould.

Eastlight has taken further precautions and actions in response to the findings in the Housing Ombudsman’s Special Report on Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, published in March 2023, in terms of a proactive communications strategy that fits the needs of our residents, especially when it comes to damp and mould.

Eastlight provides information via print (such as leaflets, postcards and/or letters), social media and, most prominently, through our website, which includes a dedicated area for damp and mould-related issues.

Through these communications, we inform residents about the importance of heating and ventilation to tackle damp and mould. We also detail our damp and mould service offer – including our Healthy Homes Team – and our responsibilities as their landlord, as well as other best practices for managing instances of penetrating damp, plumbing issues and condensation, and how to tackle it.

Our Damp and Mould site also enables concerned or worried residents to report damp and mould instantly with detailed descriptions and images through our online form, or they can report issues in other ways, such as by telephone, email and social media.

Other areas of the website explain our Tenancy Sustainment Service, our 24/7 Tenant Support & Wellbeing helpline and online portal, and information to contact us if they are struggling to pay their rent, buy enough food or heat their homes.

We also have a Health & Safety leaflet for all our residents available on the ‘Safety Checks’ page on our website, which greater outlines our responsibilities as their landlord, our residents’ responsibilities and essential tips and information to avoid any issues or hazards.

See more on the Eastlight website, here: eastlighthomes.co.uk





“
Damp & Mould Policy
published in
January 2024”

Resident Voice

C20 What are the results of the housing provider’s most recent tenant satisfaction survey? How has the housing provider acted on these results?

On 1 April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing published its Consumer Standards, and with it, a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (or TSMs) that registered social housing providers must report against.

These measures provide a baseline for how Eastlight residents generally feel about the homes and services we provide, and their overall satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with how we maintain, communicate and deliver for those living in our 13,500 homes.

At the end of 2023–24, we published our first set of TSM results for the year. A total number of 1,386 residents were surveyed to understand their views on Eastlight’s ability to meet their needs, upkeep their homes and neighbourhoods, and provide an adequate and responsive customer service.

Our key findings* were as follows:

	Satisfaction with...	Eastlight (year-end)	Sector average (mid-year median)
TP01	Overall service	70%	72%
TP02	Repairs reported in the last 12 months	72%	75%
TP03	Time taken to complete repairs in the last 12 months	66%	70%
TP04	Home is well maintained	72%	72%
TP05	Home is safe	80%	79%
TP06	Listens to tenants’ views and acts upon them	61%	61%
TP07	Being kept informed	70%	71%
TP08	Being treated fairly and with respect	78%	78%
TP09	Approach to complaints in the last 12 months	35%	34%
TP10	Communal areas	59%	66%
TP11	Positive contribution to the neighbourhood	59%	64%
TP12	Approach to anti-social behaviour (ASB)	55%	58%

*Key findings are documented as found at year end, with the results of all surveys (carried out each quarter) totalled and divided by four.

Our findings demonstrate Eastlight follows a sector trend, whereby residents generally feel that their social housing provider offers average services at best. However, many social housing tenants, including those living in an Eastlight home, feel that their landlords can perform better in areas relating to complaints, anti-social behaviour and in delivering improved services in their communities.

Through this exercise, we have identified how we recognise the experiences of those living in an Eastlight home, and we have implemented an action plan to improve our residents' overall satisfaction, showing them that we are listening. See below a few examples of our priorities over the next year:



Example One: Repairs

Seventy-two percent of residents are satisfied with repairs, but only 66% of residents are satisfied with the time taken to complete them. In 2023–24, we received 4,431 comments on our transactional surveys about repairs, with an average satisfactory score of 4.7/5.0; in these transactional surveys, residents frequently praised the conduct of staff and their ability to carry out the repair to a high standard.

However, it's clear that we need to be quicker in our response to repairs, communicate when they may be too complicated to resolve at our first visit, and update residents frequently to prevent the number of calls to our Customer Services Team about the delays to the job being completed.

As a result, we have committed to increase the number of repairs we complete within a target timescale (from 56% in April 2024, to 86% in December 2024); measure the impact of our four 'local patches' in our Repairs team, who deliver repair services to specific key areas across the East with the aim of reducing travel time; and changing our transactional surveys to measure satisfaction with repairs first-time around, better mapping the customer journey and allowing for continuous improvement.

70%

of residents satisfied
with Eastlight's
overall service



Example Two: Complaints Handling

While we resolved more than 1,000 formal complaints in 2023–24 (placing us in the upper quartile, according to Housemark), only 35% of residents were satisfied with our complaints handling process.

We have made further strides to improve the quality of our complaints process, resolving the range of issues raised by our customers; this includes establishing our Customer Experience Team in October 2023, which has helped us to keep pace and reduce the volume of complaints escalated to Stage Two of our Complaints & Resolution process.

However, only 80% of our Stage One complaints were compliant with the Complaint Handling Code, and only 56% were resolved within ten working days, with an average resolution time of just less than 14 days.

To improve this, Eastlight has added resource to its Customer Services Team, who strive to resolve all issues with early intervention before they become official complaints; reviewed our Compensation Policy which now empowers staff to give compensation earlier, creating fewer complaints in future; planned transactional surveys to measure satisfaction and support continuous improvement; and set ambitious resolution targets and reduced response wait times.

1,000

formal complaints
resolved in 23–24



Example Three: Meeting individuals' needs

Thirty percent of Eastlight residents have a disability registered on our housing management system, but 77% of residents (via our Customer Segmentation Survey in 2022) told us they were in some way affected by a physical, mental or cognitive condition which impacts on how they interact with us.

Residents with disabilities make a disproportionate number of complaints to Eastlight, suggesting we do not always adapt our services to meet their needs or always seek to improve the experience that residents with disabilities have with us.

As a result, we are implementing staff training relating to advocacy, hidden disabilities and communication; reviewing communication of repair appointments and monitoring those in need of reasonable adjustments; analysing frontline service responses in relation to protected characteristics; and better understanding how customers with disabilities or other protected characteristics might be adversely affected by service failures in our complaints process.

This is ongoing work for Eastlight. However, with an action plan in place, we hope to see more improvements over the course of 2024–25.

In addition to surveys required for tracking the TSMs, Eastlight also measures satisfaction in other ways, including following contact with our customer service, income and neighbourhood teams; two weeks after a customer has moved into a new home; and following a repair.

We send surveys by SMS and email. We introduced our 'Rant & Rave' approach in September 2019, and it generates around 13,000 customer responses per year. These responses help us to understand and tailor our services better by considering our residents' feedback, including concerns and complaints, on our repairs, planned works and other services.

77%

of Eastlight residents affected by physical, mental or cognitive conditions

C21 **What arrangements are in place to enable residents to hold management to account for provision of services?**

Eastlight is committed to ensuring its residents influence decision-making at various levels of the business and are empowered to hold the organisation to account for the homes, services and the overall experience they receive from us.

As the biggest resident-led housing association in the country, Eastlight ensures the following:

- Eastlight residents can become shareholders and are entitled to vote at our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and any Special General Meetings. Shareholder voting is required for rule changes, and for the appointment of Board Members and auditors
- We formed a Customer Influence Committee (CIC) in 2021. The CIC is part of our governance structure and is accountable to our Board. It consists of nine Eastlight residents who oversee and scrutinise services, customer-focused strategies, policies and procedures. In 2023, a recruitment campaign was launched to add three new residents to Eastlight’s CIC. Three members of our CIC also currently sit on our Board, which includes one Trainee Board Member
- Our Resident Engagement Strategy reinforces our past Community Empowerment Strategy, giving residents more meaningful opportunities to get involved and to help to shape Eastlight for the better. This includes joining our Active Residents Network (ARN) or other community groups, adding value to bespoke resident design projects, or gaining the tools, knowledge and experience needed to influence Eastlight’s decision-making, through our Resident Academy or by applying for a position on our CIC
- Eastlight’s constitution also obliges the organisation to act in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This means that performance and other key information is accessible to the public.

C22 **In the last 12 months, how many complaints has the national Ombudsman determined that maladministration took place? How have these complaints resulted in a change of practice?**

In 2023–24, we received four Housing Ombudsman determinations, each of which carried a maladministration or service failure, albeit not severe.

For each determination, we identified a range of learnings and area improvements, including policy and process reviews, in addition to complying with any orders made by the Ombudsman.

As at the end of March 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. However, the rate at which our complaints have been escalated to the Ombudsman has decreased to 0.6% (2023: 0.9%).



Resident Support

C23 What are the key support services that the housing provider offers to its residents? How successful are these services in improving outcomes?

In putting residents at the forefront of our actions, we are proud of the way we have supported customers through another turbulent year. In the year ending March 2024:

- Teams at Eastlight offered money and employment advice to more than 1,300 customers and secured £1.2m for those who needed guidance around claiming benefits
- We gave specialist help to 131 individuals who were most affected by or experienced domestic abuse first-hand, resolving a total of 133 cases
- Our colleagues supplied 27 winter food parcels for customers struggling to pay for produce and other food items for households at Christmas time
- £32,945 was given to 181 residents who were experiencing financial hardship and unable to heat their home
- We continued to support our residents with our £100,000 Tenancy Support Fund during the cost-of-living crisis
- For a second year, we funded a free and confidential 24/7 Tenant Support & Wellbeing Service to guide 411 residents (from January 2023 to March 2024) who needed advice and support around anything from relationship difficulties and debt advice to bereavement and alcohol and drug issues. The helpline formed part of Eastlight's Tenancy Support Fund
- Funding was also provided for a mental health and life enrichment mobile app, MyMindPal, offering Eastlight residents free sign up and access to use the app. The app formed part of Eastlight's Tenancy Support Fund
- We maintained our Community Common Room at our head office in Braintree. This space enables us to collaborate with government agencies and support networks to focus on how best we can jointly support residents. We make this space available for key agency partners to meet and work together for the benefit of our residents and communities. These partners include the police, adult social care and other community providers, such as domestic abuse and mental health service centres
- Our joint fund with Braintree District Council – the Braintree District Council and Eastlight Community Fund – provided four community organisations with grants totalling £85,000 over the next few years, while another six organisations were awarded grants adding up to £10,275. This not only directly supports the communities in which we work, but also gives a range of health and other wellbeing services to residents and their families.

133

domestic abuse cases resolved

Placemaking

C24 Describe the housing provider’s community investment activities, and how the housing provider is contributing to positive neighbourhood outcomes for the communities in which its homes are located.

As a resident-led, community gateway housing organisation, Eastlight continues to contribute positively to the communities in which it serves.

Driven by our previous Community Empowerment Strategy, our community empowerment incubator programme, All In, was the first of its kind in the UK. It encompassed a wide range of social factors and careful management of relationships with key stakeholders, including employees, communities and society at large.

The programme strengthened our bond with those living in our homes and communities and provided initiatives to help address critical social challenges across Essex, promoting education, healthcare and infrastructure development, in line with the UN SDGs.

For the incubator programme, we offered 20 Essex residents a chance to get paid a full-time salary to dedicate one year of their lives to solve the big social challenges affecting their communities. This led to four scalable initiatives that went on to support local people with issues directly impacting on them and their families.

One initiative provided peer-to-peer advice to help those struggling with the cost-of-living (‘Trusted’), while another helped to deliver period positivity sessions to young women to increase confidence and tackle the stigma around menstruation (‘Grow with the Flow’).

Based across Braintree, Colchester, Halstead and Witham, our four incubator teams of five Essex residents each developed and prepared their idea, presenting them in April 2023 to the All In Ideas Festival at Firstsite in Colchester. There, they showcased their social impact and gained further grant funding to continue work in their local community as private not-for-profit businesses.

Since then, the teams have either opened the doors to their new hubs or continued to support local people with a range of needs, including mental health, wellbeing support and financial advice, while building business partnerships to increase and continue their service offer.

According to Essex Business School, the Social Return on Investment (SROI) for Eastlight’s All In incubator programme was £6.26 for every pound invested in its first year.



Following our Community Empowerment Strategy and incubator activities, we published our new Resident Engagement Strategy this year. The strategy builds on our existing work, providing residents with more meaningful opportunities to help shape and influence our decision-making, particularly in the ways we deliver homes and services in our communities.

This includes supporting residents to apply for a position on our Customer Influence Committee, to get involved in our various resident design projects, or to join our All In Alliances, the Resident Academy or our Active Residents Network.

More details about Eastlight's contribution to sustainable social development can be found under the following activities:

1. All In Community Alliances

We continued to run our All In Community Alliances in Braintree, Colchester, Halstead and Witham. Our Community Alliances are open to anyone who wants to make a difference in their community, helping people connect with their neighbours, create lasting networks and identify ways of changing their communities for the better, covering issues ranging from homelessness to local parking. Eastlight provides support with venues, organisation, funding and refreshments for the quarterly Alliance meetings.

Those who have attended the Alliance meetings have formed strong local networks and voted on the disbursement of available grant monies to eligible local organisations – all to make their communities better places to live.

During 2023–24, 275 members of our communities attended these Alliance Forums to share ideas and experiences, and 12 diverse organisations received £12,000 in community grants from the Alliances to help fund their ongoing work as a result. This included, but was not limited to, the following organisations and charities:

- Homeless charity **Hope House** – which offers weekly community meals to those in need
- **Happy Hill** – supporting young people, aged three to 25 with complex needs, and 1-2-1 support workers
- **SP Healthcare** – for purchasing adaptive and sensory fitness equipment for healthcare sessions for disabled and underprivileged members of the community
- **Age Well East** – to help train specialist advisors for answering calls and emails from residents who need support with dementia, bereavement and community involvement
- **Sunnydays Baby & Toddler Group** – to cover the cost of insurance and first-aid training for volunteers.

275

community members
attended
All In Alliances

2. Resident Academy

Eastlight’s Resident Academy provides focused support so that residents can hold us accountable effectively. The Resident Academy offers Eastlight residents an opportunity to attend a free bootcamp funded by Eastlight and gives them access to high-quality training materials, tools and guest speakers. The content and support have been designed to help residents play a more active role in our governance and community initiatives.

This year, we celebrated 33 residents who graduated from our Resident Academy programme in February and in November 2023. At our head office in Braintree, resident graduates united with Eastlight’s Board, Customer Influence Committee and Executive Directors to share experiences and find out what opportunities are available to enable them to play a bigger role in shaping our strategic and operational priorities.

A further bootcamp was held in March 2024, which saw residents engage in a range of sessions, including Q&As with Eastlight’s Leadership Team and Customer Influence Committee; create solutions to anti-social behaviour, parking and homelessness; and sign up to the range of opportunities via our Active Residents Network (see more below).

Following our successful Online Resident Academy training course, titled, ‘The History of Social Housing’ in 2022-23, which received plaudits and interest from peers in the sector, we launched our second series: ‘All About Eastlight’ in 2023–24.

More than 240 people engaged with both Online Academy courses virtually in the year – educational films that feature our Board, Committees and Executive Management Team, as well as a range of sector influencers, from Birkbeck, The University of London, Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation.

3. Active Residents Network

Following the publication of our Resident Engagement Strategy, Eastlight created its Active Residents Network (ARN) in September 2023, while, at the same time, invigorating other customer groups, such as our Community Voices and Eastlight Residents Group (ERG).

One hundred and twenty-nine residents have joined our ARN. All but four of them have subscribed to our ARN mailing lists, via which we distribute digital e-newsletters, which gained a total of 400 views between January and April 2024.

Our Resident Engagement Team has interacted with members of the ARN a total of 667 times since their formation. This includes 134 responses from ARN members scrutinising our policies and services via Eastlight surveys; 39 members participating in our Resident Academy bootcamps; 19 completing in-depth telephone interviews; and 16 members attending workshops on three different hot topics for residents.





667

interactions with
our Active Residents
Network



Eastlight residents attend our
Resident Academy programme

More social value for Eastlight’s communities

The Braintree District and Eastlight Community Fund provided four community organisations with grants adding up to £85,000 over the next few years, while another six organisations were awarded grants totalling £10,275. Below are some details of the grants:

- **Halstead Community Shed** received £20,000 to support the purchase and transformation of an old ambulance station into a health and wellbeing hub. This has helped to keep the ambulance station community-owned and to combat loneliness and mental health issues in Halstead
- The **Salvation Army Housing Association** was awarded £19,000 to establish two peer support groups across the Braintree District for young people who are neurodiverse or part of the LGBTQ+ community, and at risk of homelessness
- **Home-Start Essex** provides informal, non-judgemental family support, and its £26,000 grant will help fund a family wellbeing group across Braintree over the next two years
- Mental health charity **Heads2Minds** secured £20,000 over three years to deliver a series of emotional wellbeing workshops in primary schools across the Braintree District.

Meanwhile, our Eastlight Residents Group (ERG) have supported their local communities in the following ways:

- Sponsored **Silver Ends Bowls Club**, which serves as a lifeline for several members – many of whom are older, live alone and vulnerable to social isolation. The £2,000 grant provided 80 members with new, smart uniforms for their bowls club
- Donated £5,000 to **John Ray Infants School** in Braintree so they can enjoy a new wellbeing space, filled with sensory toys, instruments, a quiet corner, and calming music and videos. The ERG has previously supported the school with a water wall within their water area; a dedicated area for outdoor scooter use, bikes and small games; a sand area and mud kitchen; and other toys and equipment
- Funded the purchase of the **Maldon & Tiptree Under-13 Panthers** team’s football kits with Eastlight-branded logos, rucksacks and training equipment.

All Eastlight teams believe that creating social value for our communities is an integral part of their work. For example, during 2023–24, our teams have:

- Built our 1,000th new home since Eastlight was formed in 2020, providing much-needed affordable housing solutions to areas across the East that need them most. The home – a wheelchair accessible bungalow – forms part of our Mount Hill development in Halstead, Essex
- Ensured the Mount Hill scheme included a play area, amenity space and environmental considerations, such as a hedgehog highway between gardens, bat and bird boxes, and a hibernaculum, for lizards and reptiles. The site is due for full completion in November 2024



- Delivered community cleaning initiatives across our estates, removing unwanted rubbish, household items and garden waste, and offering guidance to local residents about general maintenance
- Offered skips to local estates to tackle the increase in fly tipping, offsetting the cost placed on residents to remove the items themselves
- Revamped facilities and transformed overgrown communal gardens into flourishing allotments and social spaces, whilst providing waste collections, completing repairs and purchasing tools and seeds for planting
- Sponsored a range of Eastlight residents in their drive to support local communities and charities in our key areas, including cycling and football teams
- Hosted 'Tuesdays Together' at our Foundry Court Community Centre in Manningtree, a weekly session that brings the community together for a range of activities with local organisations. This includes groups that tackle social isolation and provide aid and support for other issues, including foodbank services and benefits support
- Gave captivating talks to school pupils about housing and employment, while challenging the stigma of women in construction, to educate and promote equality in our communities
- Supported residents at community day-of-action events, giving customers the opportunity to raise and resolve concerns and join our resident groups. This sometimes involved working with external organisations.



£100,000

awarded to local
businesses, charities
and community
groups



Pupils at John Ray
Infants School enjoying
their new equipment



Older Person's Scheme resident and suicide awareness author, Martin Reeves PhD, shares his thoughts since attending the Eastlight Resident Academy.

“ I attended the Eastlight Resident Academy in November 2023, and while I arrived to share the views of 30+ people in my scheme and on my estate, I came away with a completely different perspective.

“What I learned is that there is no ‘us’ and ‘them’. Together, we are both trying to make the lives of Eastlight residents that little bit better.

“Since then, Eastlight has listened to me through my involvement on the Active Residents Network (ARN) and they invited me to their Board Away Day to share my passion for suicide awareness and mental health.”





Governance

Structure & Governance

C25 Is the housing provider registered with the national regulator of social housing?

Yes, registration number L4499.

C26 What is the housing provider's most recent regulatory grading/status?

Eastlight maintained its G1/V1 rating following an annual stability check by the Regulator of Social Housing in December 2023, the highest rating available.

C27 Which Code of Governance does the housing provider follow, if any?

Under the Regulatory Framework, the Board is required to select and comply with a published Code of Governance. The Board has chosen to adopt the Code of Governance published by the National Housing Federation (NHF) in 2020 from 1 April 2021, which sets out a clear framework that organisations use to achieve a baseline for excellent governance.

The Board considers this Code to be the most appropriate for Eastlight, taking into account its size, corporate structure, community gateway principles and the nature of its activities. The Board has assessed itself against the 2020 Code and is fully compliant with it in all material respects.

The Board has also adopted the NHF Code of Conduct 2022.

C28 Is the housing provider Not-For-Profit?

Yes, Eastlight Community Homes is a not-for-profit housing association.

C29 Explain how the housing provider’s Board manages operational risks. Are ESG risks incorporated into the housing provider’s risk register?

Eastlight has Risk Registers, a Risk Appetite Statement and Risk Management Framework.

Each operational area has its own Risk Register, and individual risks are escalated to senior leaders and to the Board when the risks exceed their tolerances. The organisation’s Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) and Board review the Strategic Risk Register quarterly. Our internal audit programme also assesses operational controls and reports findings to the ARC.

Climate Change and Net Zero Carbon are considered within our Strategic Risk Register, and we have mitigations in place to ensure we plan effectively, engage our customers and can appropriately fund our projects to ensure we meet our legislative obligations, remain financially viable and succeed over the long term.

Amongst these mitigations include our in-house team of Sustainability Champions, new scheme appraisals, new-build Design Guide and various carbon reduction trials, in the form of new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) technologies.

The importance of becoming more sustainable, with a goal to achieve Net Zero Carbon by 2050, is evidenced through out these initiatives, with risks considered at Board and Executive level to ensure appropriate mitigations are employed.

The Strategic Risk Register also demonstrates mitigations regarding social and governance risks to our operations, including customer and corporate health and safety, the development of affordable homes and fraudulent activity, as well as the ability to recruit and retain the right people and develop a robust organisational culture that reinforces our purpose, mission and organisational values.

C30 Has the housing provider been subject to any adverse regulatory findings in the last 12 months (data protection breaches, bribery, money laundering, HSE breaches etc.) that resulted in enforcement or other equivalent action?

Eastlight has not received any regulatory findings or judgments in the past 12 months.

We employ a Risk Management and Governance Framework with a comprehensive Internal Audit programme to encourage compliance throughout the business with an Executive Lead who oversees that regular engagement, training and awareness is undertaken.



Board & Trustees

C31 Please answer the following:

- a) How does the housing provider ensure it gets input from a diverse range of people into the governance processes?
- b) Does the housing provider consider resident voice at the Board and senior management level?
- c) Does the housing provider have policies that incorporate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) into the recruitment and selection of Board Members and senior management?

Eastlight has a diverse Board makeup; it comprises a maximum of 12 members and can include Board Co-optees and Trainees.

Appointments to the Board are made based on careful assessment of skills, knowledge and experience to match the profile of our future business and commercial objectives. The Board has agreed to ensure that at least one Board position is held by an appropriately skilled Eastlight resident with 'lived experience'.

Board Members are drawn from a wide background, bringing together professional, commercial, local and other relevant experience. The Board undertakes an annual review of its skills and experience, and it continually aims to strengthen and enrich this when seeking new members. We may also recruit up to two Trainee Board Members in a non-voting capacity, and it is intended that these Trainee positions are for the appointment of Eastlight residents.

We encourage our residents to be active in our governance structure. On our Board are three Eastlight residents – Michelle Baker, who is Senior Independent Director of the Association; Catherine Turner; and Trainee Board Member, Steve Bentall.

Attributed to our Board are five Committees, each with eclectic expertise and knowledge held by its varied members. This includes our Customer Influence Committee (CIC), a group of nine Eastlight residents who continually champion the customer voice and appropriately influence the strategic and operational running of the organisation. They also provide assurance to the Board on the appropriateness of decisions that affect the lived experience of our customers and communities.

“Lived experience”
plays a key role
on our Board”

Following two residents leaving the Committee due to resignation or end of contract in September 2023, we welcomed three new residents to join our resident-led Customer Influence Committee in the year 2023–24. Each new member has since been assigned strategic oversight across various operational teams, including estate services, development and regeneration, and health and safety.

There are no Eastlight customers on the organisation’s Executive Team.

In 2023–24, Eastlight published its Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Policy, which explains our dedication to fostering an inclusive and diverse community in which difference is respected and celebrated. It highlights our commitment to creating workplaces and communities that promote equity on behalf of our residents.

We recruit and reward staff based on merit and without discrimination, and we deliver and promote awareness and inclusion training across our entire organisation, including for our Board, Independent Committee Members and Leadership Team.

Where it relates to Board tenure, succession and diversity, our Board adopts a policy governing its processes for renewal in line with the Eastlight Rules. Non-Executive Board Members will serve for a fixed term of office of three years expiring at an Annual General Meeting (AGM), but they will normally serve for six years extendable to a maximum of nine years.

Extending tenure beyond six years will be based upon succession planning purposes, where the appropriate representation to achieve diversity in the boardroom cannot otherwise be fulfilled.

No Non-Executive Board Member may serve on the Board for more than nine consecutive years in total, and no fixed terms may be set which exceed this requirement (Rule D10).

Eastlight’s Board also partakes in the National Housing Federation’s (NHF) Chairs’ Challenge, a public commitment in which organisations recognise the importance of diversity and inclusion and commit to developing a more equal, representative and robust Board.

We continually analyse the makeup of our workforce (including staff, executives and Board Members) via the NHF’s EDI Data Tool and implement a succession plan focused on diversity that is reviewed on a frequent basis.



In our bid to ensure our Board is also reflective of the communities in which we serve, you can find a breakdown of our Board makeup below:

Board makeup	March 2024	March 2023	Eastlight Residents
Women	60%	60%	63%
BAME	10%	10%	6%
Disability	30%	14%	34%
Average age (years)	59	59	–
Average tenure (months)	53	41	–

C32 What % of the housing provider’s Board and senior management team have turned over in the last two years?

Between April 2022 and March 2024, 23% of Board Members have turned over.

During the same period, 40% of Executive Directors have turned over.

C33 Number of Board Members on the housing provider’s Audit Committee with recent and relevant financial experience.

Five members on our Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) have recent and relevant financial experience, and three of the five have high-level expertise in that area.

C34 What % of the housing provider’s Board are Non-Executive Directors?

One hundred percent of Eastlight’s Board are Non-Executive Directors.

C35 Has a succession plan been provided to the Board in the last 12 months?

In October 2023, Eastlight’s Governance & People Committee (G&P) reviewed the Succession Plan that was approved in November 2022 and determined the Board Terms of Office remained appropriate for the current time.

A range of further exercises were carried out in the year to support the succession plan, ensuring the forward skills, knowledge and experience of the Board enable members to carry out their fiduciary responsibilities.



The G&P and Board reviewed the National Housing Federation’s Chair’s Challenge Succession Plan to determine Eastlight’s process to promote diversity of thought and experience, helping to reduce the risk of groupthink over the longer term.

The Committee also presented to the Board its review on Eastlight’s offer regarding Trainee Board Members in July 2023, providing full assurance. The Board also completed a Remuneration Review in October 2023.

In December 2023, Altair conducted a skills analysis on our Board and Committees, analysing the various skillsets across our members and determining a range of recruitment considerations for the future, particularly with suggestions to appoint to positions where Board Member tenure is soon to expire and where vast experience is currently held. This was reported and approved by Board in February 2024.

C36 **For how many years has the housing provider’s current external audit partner been responsible for auditing the accounts?**

Our current audit partner has signed off the accounts for Eastlight and one of its predecessor entities – Greenfields Community Housing – for the past seven years (since 2017–18) but has only been Eastlight’s current lead audit partner for the past five years (since 2019).

As part of the EU audit legislation, Eastlight’s current external audit partner can serve as lead partner for the housing association for a further three years.

C37 **When was the last independently-run, Board effectiveness review?**

An individual annual appraisal is undertaken of all Board and Committee Members and the Chair. An independent review of governance and Board effectiveness is undertaken every three years. In 2021, a review was supported by Savills, which informed a plan to implement recommendations.

At the time of writing this report, Eastlight’s next independent review of governance and Board effectiveness was ongoing. This will have been completed in the summer of 2024.



C38 How does the housing provider handle conflicts of interest at the Board?

Eastlight has adopted the NHF Code of Conduct and follows the principles for the identification, declaration and management of potential conflicts of interest. The process for managing such conflicts and related matters is included within the Governance Framework and Probity Policy.

All Board Members make a declaration of interest during the recruitment and selection process and on appointment. The declarations are refreshed annually and held in a register open to inspection. Board Members must inform us of any changes to conflicts of interests that may arise throughout the year, even if outside the annual review.

Interests are monitored by the Governance & People Committee (G&P) and an assurance report is produced for the Board which outlines any areas of concern. Declarations are also made verbally at the beginning of every Board and Committee meeting of any interests relevant to the business being considered.

Where personal interests arise, members are not permitted to vote on the matter being considered and may be required to withdraw from any discussion. In the case that a persistent significant conflict of interest arises, the member will be required to resign their position.

Staff Wellbeing

C39 Does the housing provider pay the Real Living Wage?

The Real Living Wage for 2024 (applicable as of April 2024) is £12.00 per hour outside London (£13.15 per hour inside London).

Eastlight is not a Real Living Wage employer, however most of the roles within the organisation exceed the Real Living Wage through our biennial benchmarking process, as per our Pay Policy.

The exception applies to our Succeed at Eastlight training programme, for which we've introduced a new pay structure for Succeed employees, whereby each is paid to the upper quartile of the minimum wage with incremental annual increases.

The lowest paid roles in our organisation are Level 6 employees (Cleaners), who are on minimum wage.

“
Men earn 4.6% more
than women
(National UK median
average: 14.9%)”

C40 What is the housing provider’s median gender pay gap?

The gender pay gap is the percentage of difference between the average pay of men and the average pay of women across the workforce. Eastlight’s latest Gender Pay Gap Report 2022–23, published in April 2024, revealed that:

- As a median average, men earned 4.3% more than women at Eastlight, compared to the National UK average (April 2022), whereby men earned 8.3% more than women
- As a mean average, men earned 4.6% more than women at Eastlight, compared to the National UK mean average, whereby men earned 14.9% more than women.

The figures above compare positively to the SRS Annual Review 2024, whereby gender pay gaps remain at 8.4% in favour of male staff, despite housing providers placing more efforts to narrow the disparity of pay between colleagues.

Of a 461-strong workforce, the gender balance in Eastlight’s workforce is 50:50 (231 female colleagues: 230 male colleagues).

In 2022–23, 418 of our people received a formal bonus, consisting of cost-of-living payments – which were available for team members at Manager-level and below – and in some cases, retention payments.

Male colleagues received 31.1% more bonus pay than female employees in the year, a 23.2% decrease than the year before (2022: 54.3%). The average bonus pay for men stood at around £752, whereas the average bonus pay for women was around £518.

The difference in pay resulted from employees in our predominantly male Home Solutions (repairs & maintenance) Team being paid a second instalment of retention payments, based on percentage of salary.

No retention bonuses were paid in 2023–24.





418
colleagues received
cost-of-living bonuses



Resident Engagement
Officer, Joanne Jackson,
at our Marks Tey hub

Other Pay Gaps

In April 2024, Eastlight also published its first ever Disability and Ethnicity Pay Gap Reports for 2022–23. The results were as follows:

- As a median average, ethnic minorities at Eastlight (44) earned 0.1% **more** than White British employees (410)
- As a mean average, ethnic minorities at Eastlight earned 8.1% **more** than White British employees, compared to the National UK average, whereby non-UK born mixed or multi-ethnic group employees earned 2.8% **less** than White British employees
- As a median average, disabled employees at Eastlight (51) earned 8.2% **more** than employees who disclosed they do not have a disability (405)
- As a mean average, disabled employees at Eastlight earned 8.2% **more** than employees who disclosed they do not have a disability, compared to the National UK average, whereby disabled colleagues earned 14.6% **less** than non-disabled colleagues.

C41 What is the housing provider’s CEO: median worker pay ratio?

For the year 2023–24, the CEO-to-employee pay ratio was:

- 6.6 times the 50th percentile (median pay), or 6.6:1

Further comparisons show that the CEO pay was:

- 8.0 times the 25th percentile of pay; and
- 5.7 times the 75th percentile of pay.

On average, the 74 housing providers in the SRS Annual Review 2024 reported their CEO-median-worker pay ratio at 8.1:1, compared to Eastlight’s ratio at 6.1:1. While we are pleased to maintain a fair pay process in our organisation, this is ongoing work for us.

Below is a year-on-year breakdown of the remuneration payable to the highest paid Director (Chief Executive), excluding National Insurance and pension contributions, relative to the number of homes owned and managed:

	2023–24	2022–23
Total homes owned and managed	12,854	12,450
Chief Executive pay, excluding all bonus pay* received (£)	195,000	185,750
Pay per unit (£)	15.17	14.92

*In the year, the Chief Executive received a one off bonus relating to a 3-year period linked to merger commitments. Including bonus, the Chief Executive received a total remuneration of £263,250 which increases the ‘Pay per unit’ to £20.49 in 2023–24.



The Single Total Figure of Remuneration (STFR) as suggested by The Companies (Miscellaneous Reporting) Regulations 2018 has been derived from: Basic Salary (including overtime payments), Bonus and Employer's Pension Contribution.

The pension value is based on an average of 6% of employee salaries across the board, although the CEO has opted for maximum company contribution of 10%. For new members of the pension scheme, Eastlight doubles the employee contribution to a maximum of 10% and has few legacy pension schemes.

C42 How is the housing provider ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is promoted across its staff?

At Eastlight, we aim to celebrate our differences, and we give everyone the opportunity to play an active role in shaping inclusive services and contributing to the development of our business and communities.

Eastlight has a dedicated Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion Manager whose strategic and functional responsibility includes promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation. Not only are they responsible for adequate reporting our customer data, organisational culture and employee engagement scores to both Executive and the Board, they also partner with like-minded organisations to promote best practice across our business and sector, as well as deliver against our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.

The EDI Strategy details our approach to ensuring we are an attractive employer of choice amongst our peers, and the steps we are taking to achieve that, through building accessibility in the fabric of our homes, services and operations; creating a culture of diversity in our workforce; and making a lasting, inclusive impact on our communities.

Our Just Being You programme forms part of our ongoing journey to being a diverse and inclusive employer in how we serve our people, customers and communities. It puts our people (the mentor) at the heart of a conversation with a member of Eastlight's Leadership Team or Board (the mentee), with the aim of sharing insight into the mentor's lived experiences, which relate directly to one or more of the nine protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

In the year, we completed our third phase, with conversations between our mentors and mentees identifying a range of actions, including addressing support for customers with hearing impairments – such as sign language services, Teams or other video calls, and 'flashing doorbells' – enhancing our approach to responsive adaptations, and reviewing our development programme to increase the delivery of accessible homes.

“
Eastlight became
Founding Partner of
disability organisation
Purple in 23–24”



We also published our pay gap reports for the year 2022–23 in April 2024, which outlines the pay disparity between different groups within our organisation and the ways in which we aim to address negative impacts. Our focus for the year to come includes staff training on disabilities and unconscious bias, as well as improving disability disclosures on our HR systems, ensuring diversity on our interview panels and creating recruitment campaigns that are specifically designed to attract diverse talent to our organisation.

Findings on our pay gaps at Eastlight can be found under C39 or in the respective reports.



In July 2023, Eastlight was named Founding Partner of national disability organisation Purple. Our joint partnership with Purple and Chelmsford-based care service provider Essex Cares Limited (ECL) has supported us in increasing neurodiversity within our workforce. Furthermore, by harnessing our partners’ experiences, expertise and data, Eastlight has driven disability inclusion and equality for our residents, housing employees and the wider sector.

Through our efforts, we achieved Disability Confident Leader (Level 3) status this year – the highest level in the government’s Disability Confident Employer scheme – for our commitment to accessibility and creating more disability inclusive environments and communities.



A number of networking groups within the organisation have flourished throughout the year, each created to help and support Eastlight colleagues to shape a more diverse workplace. For example, ‘EastPride’ brings together colleagues and allies of the LGBT+ community, to build more inclusive communications and initiatives within the organisation, and they also lead on our approach to local and regional events across the East of England, such as Essex Pride.

Eastlight has an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Policy that outlines our commitment to promoting equity, respecting diversity and ensuring inclusivity in our employment practices, access to services and in our homes. It shares how we provide a workplace free from discrimination by analysing workforce data, provide development opportunities to all on an equal basis, raise the profile of underrepresented groups, and ensure training and awareness is given to all staff, including to Eastlight’s Board, Committees and Leadership Team.

We conduct an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on all Eastlight policies, ensuring any negative impacts and actions are identified and acted upon before the policy is in statute, giving us a broader view of our influence and enabling us to identify any gaps within our organisation at the earliest opportunity.

C43 How does the housing provider support the physical and mental health of their staff?

Eastlight's Health & Safety (H&S) Manager's strategic and functional responsibilities are to oversee the complete wellbeing of our staff, including stress, burnout and workplace accidents. The position ensures that we can meet our legal H&S obligations to keep our workforce and customers safe, and that we partner with like-minded organisations that are equally committed to H&S before completing any work with them.

We have a comprehensive Total Reward Package that supports physical and mental wellbeing. Eastlight's average benefits include our annual wellbeing grant, generous annual leave allowance, BUPA healthcare cashback plan and access to private medical care, a cycle-to-work scheme, career break opportunities, trailblazing family leave (maternity, paternity and adoption), 24/7 access to an employee assistance programme, access to menopause support through BUPA, and access to our own fully-trained first aiders, as well as seven mental health first aiders. All first aiders and mental health first aiders are paid for their additional work duties and time.

We also conduct regular wellbeing and educational sessions at times to suit our people and to maximise participation both virtually and in person. We support full inclusion through our practices, policies, procedures, values and culture, which support good health. We also have access to occupational health and operate an occupational sick pay scheme.

We have facilities at our hubs to promote a positive and stimulating work environment, which includes a reflection room for all-faith praying, meditation and mindfulness. We also have recreation areas and facilities to support good nutrition, flexible and agile working, reduced gym membership costs and flu/ Covid vaccinations free of charge, for those who are not already eligible.

In 2023–24, we provided permanent staff members up to and including Heads of Service, who were employed by the end of December 2023 and not under notice, a gross payment of £500 (pro-rata for part-time staff) to help the continued financial squeeze caused by the cost-of-living. We also made sure that the payment wouldn't interfere with any benefits individuals receive, with advice and support available.

Wellbeing and H&S are discussed between staff and their line managers, with training provided to all new starters when they join the organisation. For all employees, we also launched our 'Lone Worker Guidance' – a device and app to safeguard our people when working alone in the community, in the homes of our customers or when in our offices or other establishments.

To ensure our people can carry out their work effectively on a daily basis, we provide the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and give our people instant access to completing a risk assessment, for which all activities and events must be coordinated and completed with the support of the H&S Manager.

“

Disability Confident
Leader status
achieved”

Our employee-led Eastlight Focus Group (EFG) allows our people to raise issues affecting or concerning colleagues at the top of the organisation. EFG members constructively challenge our Leadership Team and positively contribute to Eastlight’s future plans, with members leading on different areas, including health and safety, mental health and colleague wellbeing.

Other employee groups formed during the year to support Eastlight’s ongoing aims to provide good mental health and wellbeing support to its colleagues.

Eastlight also conducts regular Culture Surveys to determine general staff sentiment towards each of the following:

- Eastlight’s values and our people’s ability to live up to them
- Trust and respect across leadership, from Manager-level to Heads of Service, Directors and the Executive Team
- A sense of belonging, empowerment, creativity and innovation
- The ability to express thoughts and views, including concerns, freely and transparently.

Close internal relationships between Eastlight’s Leadership Team, EFG and colleagues from across the business have supported an enhanced working culture this year.

Areas in need of improvement have action plans in place to support those who feel passive or disengaged while working at Eastlight, and we have committed to further Culture Surveys to prioritise the needs of those working in our organisation, ensuring they have the continued support they need to make a lasting difference in their role, for our customers, our residents and our communities.

C44 How does the housing provider support the professional development of its staff?

Eastlight has Learning & Development and Organisational Development functions that work together to equip both people and the organisation in delivering better homes and services for its customers.

In 2023–24, we introduced a new training and e-learning platform to increase the knowledge and technical skills of our staff. This offers the ability for colleagues to search and complete a range of free, online courses, one-off training sessions, or apply to one of Eastlight’s in-person workshop sessions held at our head office in Braintree, from both internal and external professionals.

Furthermore, we have increased our employee offer to enable our people to learn from an in-house professional coach (usually, a member of our Leadership Team), access the range of apprenticeship opportunities with full funding from Eastlight and complete job shadowing across our workforce.



Many of Eastlight's Leadership Team also completed some additional courses and qualifications to bring strategic development and practices into the organisation and within their teams.

Our Succeed at Eastlight programme also continued this year, enabling people from a diverse range of backgrounds, capabilities or points in their career – both inside and outside our organisation – to take on a new opportunity at Eastlight. Trainees receive hands-on, on-the-job experience, a bespoke development plan and a professional qualification.

Our Talent Team's successful recruitment campaigns led to 13 trainees joining our teams and undertaking the programme throughout the year, building an increasingly diverse, skilled and competent workforce. A further five colleagues took on an apprenticeship, with another ten colleagues joining other learning and development programmes to support their future career and progression within Eastlight.

In the year, we offered paid study support to eight colleagues for qualifications relevant to their role. Four qualifications were secured for those in our Asset Management Team; two were received from members of our Development Team; and two role-related qualifications were acquired by two members from our Governance and People Team.

We also delivered bespoke training programmes to the whole organisation, with more in-depth training mandated to individuals with specialties to expand knowledge in key areas such as safeguarding, damp and mould, and asbestos awareness.

All employees have mandatory e-learning training on damp and mould, and we also have mandatory external training for select roles. 34 people attended external training last year.

Supply Chain

C45

How is Social Value creation considered when procuring goods and services? What measures are in place to monitor the delivery of this Social Value?

We are always striving to ensure that we consider social value in our specifications and requirements for all our tendering activity. Our procurement activities are conducted in a way that requires consideration of wider social economic and environmental benefits in procuring goods and services.

13

succeed at Eastlight
trainees took on new
opportunities

We achieve this in several ways, including:

- Predominantly selecting local small-to-medium enterprise (SMEs) for quotes/tenders
- Adding appropriate quality questions to score, including asking about a supplier's previous social value projects (this holds a 10% weighting, depending on the type of framework and goods/services being procured)
- Inclusion of requirements for apprentices on larger value contracts
- Only working with contractors that offer the living wage and comply with our Modern Slavery Policy.

All the Public Frameworks that we use to procure goods and services for the business provide the same social value and environmental initiatives to ensure continuity in all our procurement activity.

Contract Managers within Eastlight monitor the amount of social value delivered across our procurement activities, and they have the ability to terminate the contract if found to be non-compliant with the requirements.

Where rebates are sometimes granted (often dependent on the total cost spent on the supplier), we use that to fund and support our community empowerment budget and its varied programmes.

C46 **How is sustainability considered when procuring goods and services? What measures are in place to monitor the sustainability of the supply chain when procuring goods and services?**

As part of our procurement planning, we ensure we define the sustainability requirements by setting out environmental and ethical considerations within our project specification or contract clauses. This includes things like:

- Stipulating our requirement, for example, for all timber to be FSC-certified
- Appropriate quality questions to score (this has no weighting, but will be part of the contract)
- Compliance with all current and relevant legislation, regarding the environment and the ethical treatment of people
- Tender specification/requirements; for example, processes for managing waste.

Eastlight requires and expects our contractors to carry out their service and/or works in an ethical and sustainable manner, with Eastlight Contract Managers ensuring that all suppliers and contractors are abiding by the terms of the contract, and terminating the contract if found to be non-compliant with the requirements.

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We define our sustainability requirements within contract clauses”



Trainee Board Member, Steve Bentall, shares his experience as an influential Eastlight resident within our governance structure.

“ ‘Board Member’ was never something that I thought I would add to my CV.

“Since accepting the position of Trainee Board Member, after joining Eastlight’s Customer Influence Committee in 2022, the role has given me the opportunity to learn how housing providers operate, the dynamic between Board and the C-suite, and how Boards function with its various Committees.

“I’m proud to be an Eastlight Board Member, and it’s all down to the invaluable trust, support and training the organisation has provided me.”

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