Winter 2025



Your Eastlight residents' magazine

### 'HE'S HERE TO HELP PEOPLE'

Why Martin loves supporting his neighbours

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Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes at Eastlight?

Then come along to your Residents Conference on Wednesday, 5 March!

On the day, you will:

- Understand how you can get involved and shape Eastlight for the better
- Learn about everything from the history of social housing to the support offered to

residents experiencing anti-social behaviour

 Make connections with other residents and staff from across Eastlight.

The event takes place at Witham Public Hall from 10am to 4pm.

To find out more or to book a place, please call us or email **community@** eastlighthomes.co.uk

#### There's still time to have your say on the future of shareholding at Eastlight.

We have 4,500 resident shareholders, who are invited to Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and can vote on resolutions, including for Board Members and who our auditors should be.

At our last AGM in September 2024, just 67 shareholders voted.

During a series of workshops and conversations, residents told us shareholding doesn't give you the chance to influence and shape the services that matter to you.

So, together, we're creating a new offer to make it more meaningful for you.

HAVE YOUR





New tablet devices are helping residents living in Housing for Older People schemes communicate quickly and easily with us.

The devices include the 'Ok each day' button, so residents can confirm they're safe and well. If we don't hear from them, we'll contact them, something that scheme resident, Ann, very much appreciates:

#### It's brilliant. It makes me feel very safe."

Residents can also use the "gizmo" – as they fondly call it – to report repairs and issues.

Know a scheme resident who'd like one? Let us know.

# Welcoming **new residents!**

We've recently offered a warm Eastlight welcome to residents living in Tendring and Braintree after we acquired 128 homes from large landlord, L&Q.

The transfer of the homes, which are mainly in Clacton, Walton-onthe-Naze, Harwich, Brightlingsea and surrounding villages, took place in December.

We acquired these homes

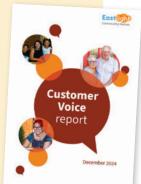
because as a local housing association, we believe we are well-placed to provide the services and support that new and existing residents want.

We funded this purchase by borrowing, so our investment in your services remains in place. In the longer term, growing will help Eastlight to invest more in community-based services for you.

#### HOW ARE WE PERFORMING?

We've lifted the lid on our performance by publishing Eastlight's first Customer Voice report.

This report brings together your feedback,



NEWS

from the complaints you make about your services to the activities residents like you take part in to shape Eastlight for the better.

It also explains how we're making improvements to address the issues you've highlighted.

You can read the report on our website. Visit www.eastlighthomes.co.uk

#### PROTECT YOUR BELONGINGS

As the season of renewal begins, why not refresh your protection, too?

Our new Contents Insurance scheme, starting at just 90p a month\*, offers affordable cover for tenants, shared owners, and leaseholders.\*\* Learn more and apply today via our website here:

### www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/ contents-insurance

\*90p per month for £4,000 standard cover. Price includes Insurance Premium Tax (IPT) charged at the appropriate rate.

\*\* Please note the scheme is not available to leaseholders who sub-let their homes. Acceptance restrictions may apply for conviction and claims experience. Terms and conditions apply. Acceptance restrictions may apply for conviction and claims experience. Terms and conditions apply. The policy is arranged by Aon UK Ltd and underwritten by Aviva Insurance Limited and administered by Wessex Administration Services Limited who are all authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. FP.TCI.2025.281.SD

Winter 2025



# A CHANGE TO YOUR RENT THIS APRIL

IF YOU ARE AN EASTLIGHT TENANT, YOUR RENT WILL INCREASE BY 2.7% FROM APRIL 2025. IF YOU ARE A SHARED OWNER, YOUR RENT WILL CHANGE BASED ON YOUR LEASE AGREEMENT WITH EASTLIGHT.

We know that any increase in bills can affect your household budgets. If you are struggling, or worried about how to pay your rent, please contact us.

By the middle of March, you will receive your rent letter confirming the increase and the support we offer.

#### WHY IS YOUR RENT INCREASING?

The Government sets out how much we can increase your rent by. This year, the maximum permitted is the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in September 2024 plus 1%, which is 2.7%.

As a not-for-profit organisation with rising costs impacting how we work, the rent you pay us helps ensure we deliver the essential services you rely on.

From maintaining your homes to building new, affordable homes for the local community and investing in your estates, we're continually working towards improving your services so you can live happily in your home.

#### WHERE WILL YOUR RENT BE SPENT?

Your rent funds the services we provide. For example, last year, we completed almost 40,000 repairs and installed over 1,000 new components in your homes, including kitchens, bathrooms and heating systems.









Source: Annual Report 2023/24 Read it at www.eastlighthomes.co.uk

# "ALEX HAS GONE ABOVE AND BEYOND"

N igel Jennings recently received a winter fuel voucher and foodbank support to help him in his home. Thanks to the support of Tenancy Sustainment Co-ordinator, Alex, Nigel was able to get back on track after a stressful few months.

"Alex has gone above and beyond to support me by listening to my issues and helping me through a difficult time. I was really grateful to receive foodbank support, but I was struggling and couldn't go out and collect it. Alex went out of his way to pick up my foodbank parcel and deliver it to me – he's a real credit to Eastlight," says Nigel. "I also received the Winter Fuel Voucher which has been a lifesaver this year, especially as it's been so cold these past months – it's been a huge help. Eastlight have been very supportive and I can't thank them enough for everything they've done to help me."



#### **HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOU?**



Our Income Team are on hand to support you. Helping you to manage your rent, they can provide rent balances and provide payment plans to help.



Are you receiving all the benefits you're entitled to? Our expert team can help you to apply for the right support.



If you're facing difficult decisions on how to spend your money, we may be able to help with short-term financial support, including heating and foodbank vouchers.

#### For more information contact us on:



0330 128 0330



eastlighthomes.co.uk

SUPPORT FOR YOU

# HELP IS A PHONE CALL AWAY

#### JULIE'S\* STORY REVEALS HOW WE CAN SUPPORT SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE.

After years of living in fear, Julie<sup>\*</sup> is now living in a new home following support from Eastlight's Intervention and Enforcement Team.

They acted following a referral from Julie's local authority. With the help of local domestic abuse charity Next Chapter, the survivor had already gained support to prevent the perpetrator from communicating with them through a non-molestation order. Yet, despite this, the perpetrator continued to instil fear.

The team investigated the history of the relationship between Julie and the perpetrator after Essex Police told them they had received several reports of domestic abuse over a number of years.

With this and other clear evidence from partner agencies, a plan was made to move Julie into a new home. With this and other clear evidence from partner agencies, a plan was made to move Julie into a new home"

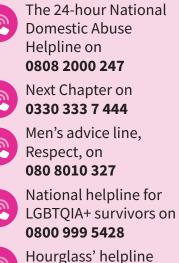
Finding the right home, away from the area, can take a bit of time. Until then, we offered to install extra security measures to help Julie feel safer in her home. We also worked closely with various partners to ensure the family were supported and safe in their current home.

Five months later, Eastlight's Lettings Team had sourced a new home for the family in a suitable location.

After feeling like a move would never happen, Julie was thankful for moving into their new home and thanked the team for their support. If you're experiencing abuse and are ready to speak to someone about it, please call us on **0330 128 0330** or fill out our online form here: eastlighthomes.co.uk/ extra-support/domesticabuse

We can support you. You're not alone.

#### **EXTRA SUPPORT**



0808 808 8141

\*We have changed Julie's name to protect her anonymity

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# WHAT ARE RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS?

#### EVERY YEAR, OUR REPAIRS TEAMS AND CONTRACTORS CARRY OUT TENS OF THOUSANDS OF REPAIRS TO HELP YOU STAY SAFE AND HAPPY IN YOUR HOME.

Ccasionally, we will complete a repair that is not Eastlight's responsibility to complete. Under our Recharge Policy, we will now consider whether we should charge the tenant for this repair.

#### WHAT REPAIRS COULD BE RECHARGED?

Examples include:

- Damage that goes beyond natural wear and tear
- Home improvements made without applying for landlord's consent
- Clearing items left behind when a resident moves out.

We will take a fair approach and make exceptions – for example if the damage was caused by a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

#### WHY ARE YOU INTRODUCING THIS POLICY?

The policy is being introduced with the approval of Eastlight residents on the Customer Influence Committee.

Most of our income comes from rent paid by residents, and we want to make sure we spend this fairly.

We won't make any profit from this – we'll recover the costs, only. We will always attempt to discuss the recharge with the resident before going ahead, and we'll only pursue costs over £100.



Eastlight's Executive Director of Property, Charlotte Todd said:

We want to ensure residents are
 treated fairly, and that means
 occasionally recharging for work in certain situations.

"We will always try to contact you before issuing a recharge, so if there are reasons why you think the charge isn't fair, then we will listen and make the appropriate decision."

#### **FIND OUT MORE**



Read our Recharge Policy here: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/policies

Request consent to carry out home improvements here: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/ my-home/making-changes SUPPORT FOR YOU

# **POLICIES:** WHAT DO THEY MEAN FOR ME?

AS EASTLIGHT RESIDENTS, YOU KNOW YOUR HOMES AND COMMUNITIES BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE.

That's why residents on our Customer Influence Committee and Active Residents Network have worked closely with us in recent months to refine several key policies and strategies. By doing so, your voices are at the forefront of any decision we make.

You can read all our strategies and policies on our website: **www.eastlighthomes.co.uk**. If you can't access the website, or if you have any questions about policies, then please contact us.



#### CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

We've introduced a new strategy setting out what you should expect when you receive services from us. It makes clear where we need to improve, including by providing services based on your needs and by introducing a new and improved self-service offer for residents who would prefer to access information and services online.

The strategy also takes the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards and Tenant Satisfaction Measures into account, which have been designed to give you more power to hold us to account for the experience you receive from us.



### COMPLAINTS & RESOLUTIONS POLICY

This sets out how we respond when you're unhappy with the service you've received. Typically, this means we will investigate your complaint and attempt to resolve it. If we cannot resolve to your satisfaction, you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. The policy also explains where we may take a different approach – for example when you are experiencing anti-social behaviour.



#### **HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY**

Your safety is our priority. This policy explains how we will carry out our work so that we minimise the risk to yours and others' health and safety. Please contact us if you're ever in an accident or encounter a 'near miss' that you believe has been caused by an issue in your home or a communal area we manage.



#### LEASEHOLD MANAGEMENT POLICY

Leaseholders can expect clear guidance on how we manage your leasehold home, including setting fair service charges, dealing with breaches of leases, and addressing concerns like anti-social behaviour. •

#### **AFFORDABILITY POLICY**

We provide part-buy, part-rent Shared Ownership homes as an alternative to buying a home on the open market. This policy explains that these homes are allocated fairly on a first-come, first-served basis and sets out the assessments we carry out to see if the home is affordable for the potential buyer.

#### MANAGING BEHAVIOURS POLICY

Very occasionally, our teams are subject to aggressive or abusive behaviour, or unreasonable demands, when carrying out their work. This policy sets out how we will respond in those situations and the steps we will take to ensure we can maintain communication and services to all customers.

#### AIDS & ADAPTATIONS POLICY



This outlines how we work with local authorities and occupational therapists to help you live safely and independently in your home. From minor changes, like grab-rails and stairlifts, to supporting your move to a more adapted home, we're here to help.

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SUPPORT FOR YOU

### SUPPORTING YOU WITH DAMP AND MOULD

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DAMP AND MOULD IN YOUR HOME, PLEASE CONTACT US. ur Healthy Homes Team will visit you within two weeks of you reporting issues. They'll find out more and try to find the best solutions to remove the damp and mould and prevent it from coming back.

We know that there can be many reasons for damp and mould growth. While using extractor fans and opening windows do help, there are often structural issues that are our responsibility to resolve. To book a visit, please contact us using any of our contact details.

If you have internet access, you can submit pictures of the affected areas using our damp and mould form, which will help us diagnose the issue.

You'll also find useful information on our website about how to manage damp and mould in your home, and some examples of causes. Visit: www.eastlighthomes. co.uk/my-home/damp-andmould





#### TENANCY FRAUD OCCURS WHEN A SOCIAL HOME IS OCCUPIED BY SOMEONE WITHOUT THE RIGHT TO DO SO.

Typically, they may be unlawfully subletting the home to someone else and collecting the rent. Other cases include people misrepresenting themselves to secure a social home or abandoning it.

Thousands of people are on social housing waiting list in our communities, so every case of Tenancy Fraud deprives someone of a home they need.

Our Tenancy Management Team is working hard to tackle this issue to ensure our homes go to those who need them most. "With a housing crisis in the UK, we take tenancy fraud very seriously," says Keeley Dow, Housing Manager for Tenancy. "Every report is investigated, and we'll take action to ensure properties are being used as they should be. Together, we can make a real difference to our communities to make sure housing goes to those most in need."



# EVERYBODY NEEDS GOOD

#### MARTIN BRIGHT IS A GOOD FRIEND TO RESIDENTS AT A HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE SCHEME – AND OUR FIRST NEIGHBOURHOOD HERO.

t's often said that there's no community spirit anymore.

Well, tell that to Martin Bright and his neighbours at Woodlands Housing for Older People scheme in Braintree.

Martin helps his neighbours with everything from sorting food bank vouchers to walking them home safely – and says he's benefited as much as anyone.

#### **NATURALLY KIND**

When Martin, 38, moved into his flat in 2018, he struggled with his mental health and kept to himself. However, his naturally kind nature couldn't resist gleaming though and he slowly got to know people.

Soon, a "A Cup of Tea Club" was formed, where neighbours chat, put the world to rights and play games.

Martin soon discovered he could help with tasks other residents were struggling with, and is now a lifeline to some.

He said: "People struggle with using technology, and I give them a hand. I help with food vouchers, energy vouchers, phones, laptops. I don't mind talking on Martin helping a fellow Eastlight resident

the phone on people's behalf. I even took a sofa upstairs the other week, and am also happy to walk people safely home, if it's dark or they need help."

Neighbour Sandra is now happy and warm in her home, thanks to Martin helping her to sort out energy vouchers and her Universal Credit claim. She said: "I wouldn't have put the heating on if it wasn't for Martin. He's here to help people."

Martin can also turn his hand to the land. 81-year-old Richard, who is waiting for a new knee and has mobility problems, said: "Martin helps me with the scheme's garden – he's very good. If anyone needs a hand, Martin's always there. He's brilliant – always helping people." Providing support to others also helps Martin, who said: "Coming over to the communal lounge gets me out of the flat – it's helped me a lot to get out and talk to people. I've actually become social and chatty!"

#### **HIGH PRAISE**

Martin has high praise for Amanda Clare, Tenancy Sustainment Co-ordinator at Eastlight. Her team provides additional support, including advice on managing your finances and getting food bank vouchers.

Martin said: "Amanda's so personable. She goes the extra mile and doesn't give up when helping someone. She makes sure things are as they should be."

Know a neighbourhood hero who deserves recognition? Let us know!



shine@ eastlighthomes.co.uk

0330 128 0330

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#### THE CUSTOMER INFLUENCE COMMITTEE WANTS

#### **"HELLO EVERYONE,**

As Chair of Eastlight's Customer Influence Committee (CIC), I'm excited to share what we've been working on to make sure Eastlight delivers the homes and services you need.

The committee is made up of residents like you and me, who are passionate about championing your voice and ensuring your experiences continue to shape Eastlight's decision-making. Together, we aim to create positive, lasting change.

Since our last Shine Magazine update, we have:

- Shared our experiences and reviewed service standards

   including around damp and mould and antisocial behaviour – during Eastlight's all-staff sessions
- Participated in strategy meetings with the Board, creating new ideas for what a better resident engagement offer could look like in the future
- Appointed CIC Member, Craig Clackett, as the resident lead for Customer Voice. Craig will work to strengthen the relationship

between the committee, the Active Residents Network and our Eastlight Resident Groups to make sure we all have an equal voice and make Eastlight more 'resident-led'.

Finally, we've also challenged and approved several policies and strategies. This includes a detailed deep dive into improving Eastlight's damp and mould service and giving the new Customer Service Strategy the green light. See pages 8-9 for more on this.

#### LIKE WHAT YOU HEAR? HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO GET INVOLVED!

This February, we are looking for two passionate tenants, shared owners or leaseholders to join our Customer Influence Committee.

In this role, you'll work with me and other residents to share your ideas, challenge decisions and contribute to Eastlight's big future plans. You'll also develop a range of skills that will help support others and make a real difference in our communities. Catherine Turner, Chair, Customer Influence Committee

We're looking for someone who can be a good voice for all Eastlight residents, who values fairness and inclusivity, can communicate well with others, and wants to use their experience to help shape Eastlight for the better.

#### **SOUND LIKE YOU?**

The role of Customer Influence Committee Member will go live near the end of February. We'll be sharing all information via our Vacancies page, your email inbox and social media feed – so keep an eye out!

If you've got any questions, please call Eastlight or email **Governance@** eastlighthomes.co.uk.

For more details, including pay and time commitment, please check the job description via the Vacancies website page.

#### Thanks and good luck.

**Catherine Turner**, Chair Customer Influence Committee."

# MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR **NEIGBOURHOO**

#### THE NEWLY REFORMED EASTLIGHT RESIDENTS GROUPS FOR BRAINTREE, WITHAM AND HALSTEAD HAVE BEEN BUSY OUT AND ABOUT IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOODS.

Joining our Resident Engagement Team and Estate Safety Officers on walkabouts around your estates, the groups have identified areas of improvement across all three towns.

From spotting issues with fly tipping to ways we can improve communal areas, all issues identified as our responsibility have been reported to our teams.

In December, the groups met to discuss the best ways to resolve the identified issues.



At their meetings, they agreed on:

- Sprucing up the communal space at Godric's Place in Braintree by installing seating and planters.
- Installing seating in the communal garden at Colne Valley Close in Halstead. Plus, the uneven drains in the garage area have now been fixed.
- Painting carpark lines on Honeysuckle Way in Witham and planting some flowers to brighten up the area.

We'll be hosting more estate walkabouts this year, and we're looking at the best way to offer more to residents who live outside these areas. Watch this space for more information!

#### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

The next Eastlight Residents Group meetings will take place on:

**Witham** – Tuesday, 11 March, Rex Mott Court, Witham

Halstead – Tuesday, 18 March, Nash Court, Halstead

**Braintree** – Wednesday, 19 March, Eastlight House, Braintree

#### **TO GET INVOLVED**

Complete our simple form: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/ my-community/residentinvolvement



community@ eastlighthomes.co.uk

0330 128 0330

# WENDY'S READY TO LEARN

#### NEW WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITY FOR **EASTLIGHT RESIDENTS INCLUDES CHANCE TO GAIN QUALIFICATION**

astlight resident Wendy Harris is ready for a new challenge – after landing an exciting work experience opportunity at Eastlight.

Wendy, an Eastlight resident for 30 years, is the first Dale Butcher Resident Work Experience Programme recipient and began her journey last month.

The Hatfield Peverel resident said: "I learned about the programme in Shine's last issue. I though it looked interesting, especially as I'm curious as to what goes on behind the scenes with any organisation. Maybe I'll be giving something back to Eastlight as well. I feel very grateful for the two homes that I've lived in."

The programme aims to give people an insight into the work we do. Wendy will also receive training from the Chartered Institute of Housing, gaining valuable skills and an industry-recognised qualification.

66 I have never done anything like this before, but I think it's a brilliant opportunity."

Eastlight resident, Wendy Harris

It is named in homage to our former Vice-Chair of Board, Dale Butcher. With bags of experience from across the sector, Dale, along with Development Manager, Debbie Mitchell and Asset Manager, Charlie Edgar, will help tutor Wendy, giving her a valuable insight into the housing industry.

Wendy added: "I'm really looking forward to seeing the purchase and progression of new housing developments being planned, built and subsequently occupied. Who knows, we might even get muddy boots with our British weather on any site visits.

"I have never done anything like this before, but I think it's a brilliant opportunity.

"All being well, it will be great to gain a new professional qualification, have a wealth of practical knowledge, and to explore if I might like to pursue a new career in housing and construction.

"I think it's such as good thing that Eastlight want to involve residents in as many directions as possible, with regards to how they operate and their aspirations in housing people."

OUR COMMUNITIES

## FUNDING HELPS HUNDREDS

#### FROM YOUNG CARERS TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORS, OUR JOINT FUND WITH BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL IS HELPING HUNDREDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE.

The Braintree District and Eastlight Community Fund was set up in 2015 by Braintree District Council and Eastlight (then Greenfields). More than £1 million has been given in grants since then, with eight organisations funded this year.

They include Action for Family Carers, which is receiving £20,000 to help keep their Young Carers Club in Witham running. Young Carers Service Manager, Jo Hotten, said:

"One in five school children are estimated to be young carers. They take on demanding responsibilities normally expected of an adult, which can be hugely worrying and stressful.

"Our Witham Young Carers Club enables around 25 young carers per year to take a much-needed break from caring, make new friends with other local young carers, and simply have fun!"





# NEW HALSTEAD HOMES ARE COMPLETE

RESIDENTS ARE SETTLING INTO THEIR NEW HOMES AFTER THE COMPLETION OF MOUNT HILL IN HALSTEAD, ESSEX – OUR FIRST EASTLIGHT-LED DEVELOPMENT.

A ccess to good quality, affordable housing is key to supporting the wellbeing of residents.

That's why all 71 of these homes are allocated as affordable housing, unlike the usual 30% housing developers usually allocate. This aims to give residents the foundations for a fresh new start in an energyefficient, high-quality home.

Mum-of-two, Charlea Norris, 29, moved to Mount Hill last year. She said: "We were unable to get a mortgage big enough for the house we needed. We would have never been able to have a house like this without the scheme.

"I think it's important more houses and schemes become available. It is important people have the chance to be able to own their own homes and be able to afford it and live. It gives families a good opportunity and a chance to provide a roof over their heads without getting into financial struggles and worries."

# MAKING A COMPLAINT

### AT EASTLIGHT, WE AIM TO GIVE YOU CONSISTENTLY GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE.

owever, we recognise that – from time to time – we fail to meet your expectations.

Please tell us if you're not happy with the service you receive. We will work with you to try and find a resolution, and we also review our complaints to identify trends and improve your services.

We accept complaints made over the phone, in-person, by email or letter and online – including via social media. Our contact details are below. We accept complaints made over the phone, in-person, by email or letter and online"

# Contact us

