

# Value for Money (VfM) Report

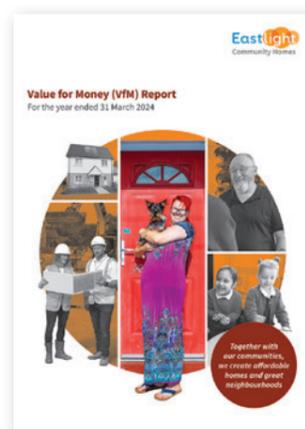
For the year ended 31 March 2024



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

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Eastlight resident,  
Sonata Dambrauskiene,  
outside her home

# Foreword from David



**As the Executive Director of Finance at Eastlight Community Homes, I am pleased to present our Value for Money (VfM) Report for the financial year ending 31 March 2024.**

This report outlines our commitment to delivering value to our residents and stakeholders within the communities we serve, as we continue to work within a challenging economic environment marked by high inflation, rising interest rates and a persistent cost-of-living crisis.

Over the past year, we have shown resilience and proactive engagement while continuously striving to enhance our services, develop new homes and support our communities in the ways they needed most.

We delivered 417 new homes this year, a 29% increase on 2022–23. Additionally, we invested £13m in major capital works, improving our existing homes with a range of energy-efficiency and safety measures to enhance quality of life, security and sustainability.

As the largest resident-led housing association in the country, we recognise the value that community involvement and resident engagement bring to our operations.

Our Customer Influence Committee (CIC) a crucial part of our governance structure, is composed entirely of Eastlight residents, and plays a crucial role in decision-making, ensuring our actions align with the community and individual needs. This year, we launched our Resident Engagement Strategy 2023–26, offering our customers even more opportunities to shape our services so they can have a lasting impact on our day-to-day and long-term business decisions.

Initiatives like 'All In' and the Resident Academy have continued to empower residents and deliver community-led solutions to real local challenges, with our All In Incubator programme showing a significant social return on investment of £6.26 for every pound invested.

Our robust financial strategy supports Eastlight's growth and investment while maintaining a strong balance sheet. We completed a refinancing initiative, securing a new £60m loan with NatWest and a £50m interest rate swap, ensuring more than 80% of our interest costs are fixed, which will allow us to offer a consistent service over the long term. This approach provides stable funding and enables us to plan and execute long-term projects confidently.

Despite economic pressure and a greater demand on all housing associations to deliver more transparently and ambitiously for their customers, Eastlight continues to deliver value for money through efficient resource management, strategic investments and a solid focus on social impact.

Our achievements this year reflect our resilience, adaptability and dedication to creating better, stronger and sustainable communities. While we anticipate more challenges in the years ahead, the work of the Eastlight team and our partners has placed us in the best possible position to adapt with relative ease.

You can read our full Annual Report & Financial Statements for the year 2023–24 on our website:

[www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/corporate-publications](http://www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/corporate-publications)

**Thank you.**

*David Mullen*

**David Mullen**

Executive Director of Finance  
Eastlight Community Homes

**£60m**

loan secured with  
NatWest

**417**

new affordable homes  
(324 in 2022–23)

## Value for Money (VfM) Statement

### Reinvestment of VfM Gains

Eastlight Community Homes seeks to reinvest surplus funds into our new and existing homes. This helps reduce the amount of borrowing we need to fund our ambition to improve and grow. It is important we generate surpluses that enhance Eastlight's strong balance sheet, creditworthiness and support our growth ambitions.

The Corporate Strategy (2021–26) sets out our ambition to deliver new homes. We made strong progress this year, delivering 417 homes, 29% more than the 324 homes we delivered in the previous year, and against a target of 398.

While many organisations in our sector make bigger reductions or cease development plans altogether, we remain active in the market; year-on-year, we have continued to surpass our new homes targets and our development programme remains healthy amid ongoing economic pressure.

As at 31 March 2024, we were in contract or on site with 1,126 new homes and we had a pipeline of a further 265, of which 26% will be Eastlight-led in terms of quality and design.

We balance our focus on quality and quantity. We are determined that the homes and communities we deliver on Eastlight-led schemes will meet the high standards as outlined in our Design Guide.

We are pleased to report that, during 2023–24, we invested £13m into our major capital works programme across our existing homes. This allowed us to install 82 new bathrooms, 124 new kitchens, 603 new boiler systems and other heating systems, 77 new roofs, 565 new fire doors, and fitted new windows into 95 homes. These investments enhance the experience of residents who live in these homes, as well as improving energy efficiency and overall safety. We did this while achieving 99.9% compliance (100% as at May 2024) with the Decent Homes Standard and meeting all our lending covenants.

Our Sustainability Strategy 2022–27 formalises our plans to improve the energy efficiency of all our homes to at least EPC-C by 2030 and achieve the government's Net Carbon Zero 2050 target.

With 13,454 homes owned and managed, 459 employees and a turnover of £94.5m, we constantly strive to achieve social value for our communities, extending our reach, efficiency, effectiveness and impact. We are ambitious about investing more in resident-led services that benefit our communities, while building homes our customers and communities can afford, and in the places that they want to live.

**£13m**  
investment in  
capital works

### Maximising our Social Impact

Being the largest resident-led housing association in the country, Eastlight believes VfM is about more than just cost savings and efficiencies. For us, it's also about maximising our social impact and building better, stronger, sustainable communities, where residents have the power to help shape a better service.

Our residents know their homes and communities better than anyone else. That's why it's crucial for us to have effective ways to ensure our residents have meaningful influence over how Eastlight works and what we prioritise. To help make this happen, we developed a robust Customer Influence Committee (CIC) in 2021. This Committee, composed entirely of Eastlight residents, is a full and equal Committee of the Board. It ensures that residents contribute to strategic decision-making with a clear voice, providing support and challenge to our Board and Executive Management Team. This helps us to focus on delivering what residents and communities value most.

The Committee, which consists of up to nine Eastlight residents, provides stewardship in managing risks, customer services, operational issues and our community empowerment initiatives.

This includes the three new residents who joined the CIC in September 2023, each with specialist oversight across our estate services, development and regeneration programme, and health and safety practices.

In December 2023, we also launched our Resident Engagement Strategy 2023–26. This enables residents to get more involved with Eastlight in a variety of ways, including joining our resident and community-led groups and networks, adding value to bespoke resident design projects, and seeking opportunities to join our governance structure, such as our CIC.

**£94.5m**  
turnover

### Tackling Damp & Mould

Teams across our organisation are driven by providing value to our customers. Still in a time of high inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, many Eastlight residents are struggling to heat their homes efficiently and/or still need a range of energy efficiency improvement works. These issues combined have left many residents experiencing damp and mould in their home.

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 days to complete and resolve works – checking moisture levels, washing down mould and scheduling any follow-on work – liaising with other teams and contractors where appropriate to manage damp and/or mould in future. This includes a dedicated Resident Liaison Officer who keeps in contact with the customer throughout any ongoing jobs to ensure they get the continued support they need.

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



**1,630**  
damp and mould cases responded to through the year

### During 2023–24, our colleagues in Asset Management also delivered value in other ways, including:

- Completing all cladding removal and remediation works on 11 to 18-metre-high buildings in our portfolio, better securing building safety for residents
- Partnering with SHIELD (Smart Heat & Intelligent Energy in Low-income Districts) to engage residents and seek grant funding to trial new energy efficiency technologies, reducing our carbon footprint and overall energy use in our customers' homes
- Joining the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) scheme to fund minimal loft and defective cavity wall insulations to improve and bring our outstanding homes to EPC-C, at zero cost to Eastlight and residents
- Terminating contracts where contractors were charging too much
- Shaping our new grounds maintenance offer with residents to ensure our estates and communities remain clean, safe and tidy.



**100%**  
of new homes achieved an EPC-B rating

**Meanwhile, our colleagues in Development:**

- Came closer to completing our 71-home Mount Hill scheme in Halstead, Essex, which provides 55 homes for shared ownership and 16 for a mix of affordable and social rent, with £3m grant funding from Homes England. Without our intervention, these homes would have been built for private sale
- Ensured the Mount Hill development is a sustainable place to live, adding a play area, an amenity space and promoting biodiversity with features such as a hedgehog highway, bat and bird boxes, and a hibernaculum for lizards and reptiles. The site is due to be fully complete in November 2024
- Delivered the 1,000th new home built since Eastlight was formed in 2020 – a wheelchair, accessible bungalow, located at Mount Hill
- Acquired previous brownfield site Whatfield Road in Elmsett, Ipswich, which will deliver 18 new homes for social rent (9) and shared ownership (9). The former site of a garden centre and nursery, this site will be the first development to meet the full specification as outlined in our Design Guide
- Continued progress at Bovingdon Road in Bocking, now in the detailed design and planning approval phase. The development will bring 70 new affordable homes to the site of a former textiles factory
- Partnered with SaaS platform Clixifix® to create a more streamlined new-build aftercare service, which helps improve the quality of our response to issues raised by our residents and developer partners
- Placed 45th in the Inside Housing ‘Top 50 Biggest Builders’ list for building the most homes in the UK, and 42nd in the list for the number of homes in the pipeline.

**1,000**  
new homes delivered since 2020



**18**  
new homes for social rent and shared ownership in Elmsett, Ipswich

### Empowering our Communities

In 2022–23, launching our groundbreaking ‘All In’ initiative, we offered 20 Essex residents a chance to get paid a full-time salary to dedicate a year of their lives to solve the big social challenges in their communities. One initiative provided peer-to-peer advice to help those struggling with the cost-of-living, while another helped to deliver period positivity sessions to young women to increase confidence and tackle stigma around menstruation.

Based across Braintree, Colchester, Halstead and Witham, our four incubator teams developed and prepared each idea, presenting them in April 2023 at the All In Ideas Festival in Colchester. There, they showcased their efforts and gained further 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 various 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 our All In Incubator programme was £6.26 for every pound invested in its first year.

### Resident Academy

Eastlight also relaunched its Resident Academy for a second year (2023–24), which provides our residents with the information, training and tools needed to hold us to account and to enable them to get more involved in shaping Eastlight for the better.

Our Resident Academy attendees joined a free bootcamp, funded by Eastlight, with a wide-ranging agenda designed to help them get ready to play a more active role in our governance and community initiatives.

Following two academies in February and November 2023, 33 Resident Academy students graduated the programme, receiving their certificates at a special ceremony held at our head office in Braintree. 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.

Building on the success of our 2022–23 online Resident Academy training course, ‘The History of Social Housing’, 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. The courses featured contributions from our Board, Committees and Executive Management Team, as well as a range of sector influencers from the Birkbeck University of London, Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation.

### Community Alliances

This year, we continued to run our All In Community Alliances in Braintree, Colchester, Halstead and Witham. The 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 to invigorate their communities. Eastlight provides support with venues, organisation, funding and refreshments for the quarterly Alliance meetings.

During 2023–24, 275 members of our communities attended Alliance meetings. Eastlight provided £12,000 in small community grants to 12 local organisations, voted for by the Alliances, that would help deliver on the actions agreed at the meetings and make their communities better places to live.



**£6.26**  
SROI for All In

**33**  
Resident Academy  
students graduated  
the programme

**We also supported and invested in our communities in the following ways:**

- We provided benefits advice, including money management and employment guidance, to more than 1,300 customers, which led to £1.2m in financial support
- We supplied 27 winter food parcels for customers struggling to pay for produce and other food items for their families at Christmas time
- Our Tenant Support & Wellbeing Service supported 411 residents via the free and confidential 24/7 hotline and online portal from January 2023 to March 2024, with common requests highlighting the need for in-the-moment clinical and emotional support: from stress, panic attacks and anxiety, to health and wellbeing, sleep disruption and family relationship issues
- We maintained our Community Common Room at our head office in Braintree. This space enables us to work more closely together with government agencies and support networks to focus jointly on how best we can support our residents. We also 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



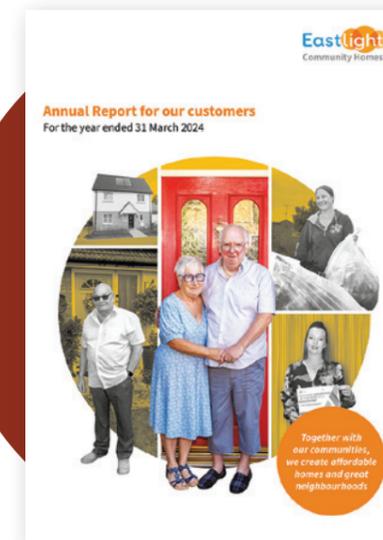
**£95,000**  
awarded to local businesses, charities and community groups

- 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 totalling £10,275.

Highlights include:

- **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.

Eastlight Community Homes’ Board publishes a separate Annual Report for Customers, which sets out our progress and achievements around VfM. It incorporates our performance for the year, as well as our planned actions for the coming 12 months. The report is published on our website: [www.eastlighthomes.co.uk](http://www.eastlighthomes.co.uk).



Eastlight’s Annual Report for Customers 2023–24

**£1.2m**  
secured in benefits and financial wellbeing support

### Delivering VfM through our Financing Activities

In 2023–24, Eastlight successfully completed the refinancing initiative launched in the summer of 2022. This included securing a new £60m loan with NatWest, further bolstering our financial resources to support our investment goals and demonstrating the confidence our investors have in us, following the £125m in new loan facilities raised in the previous year.

To enhance our protection against interest rate fluctuations, we added a £50m interest rate swap when rates were favourable. This strategic move means that over 80% of our interest costs were fixed at the end of the year, helping shield us from market volatility and allowing us to invest and forecast cash flows with confidence.

We have also made significant strides in transitioning all Eastlight’s bank lending to sustainability-linked loans. This approach helps align the way we fund the business with Eastlight’s wider Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) targets, giving us financial incentives to make progress in these key areas.

Our robust and proactive approach to treasury management ensures that Eastlight maintains excellent access to funding. We plan ahead so that we can navigate the market on our own terms to secure favourable deals, rather than being forced to accept less attractive options due to financial pressure.

Value for Money is a fundamental principle guiding our treasury management activities. By making sure Eastlight always has reliable access to funds at competitive rates and with minimal interest risk, we directly support our efforts to deliver value for money both in the present and the future. Ultimately, our goal is to maximise Eastlight’s financial resources, enabling us to invest in improving services, upgrading existing homes and building new homes.

Our recently secured facilities provide us with predictable and reliable funding for the next decade. This stable financial platform allows us to confidently plan and execute long-term projects, ensure continuity of service and consistently deliver value for money to our residents.

**£50m**

interest rate swap,  
with 80% of interest  
costs fixed

### Value for Money Metrics

Our Board prioritises VfM to ensure that Eastlight uses its resources effectively and maximises the positive impact we make on our residents and the wider community.

We also use the Regulator of Social Housing’s VfM metrics to assess our performance and benchmark ourselves to other organisations. Our selected peer group includes organisations that are similar in terms of status, operating models and geographical locations. In choosing these peers, we also looked for their strategic goals aligning with our focus on resident involvement and community empowerment. Additionally, we include organisations whose size and development plans align with our ambitions as outlined in our Corporate Strategy (2021–26).

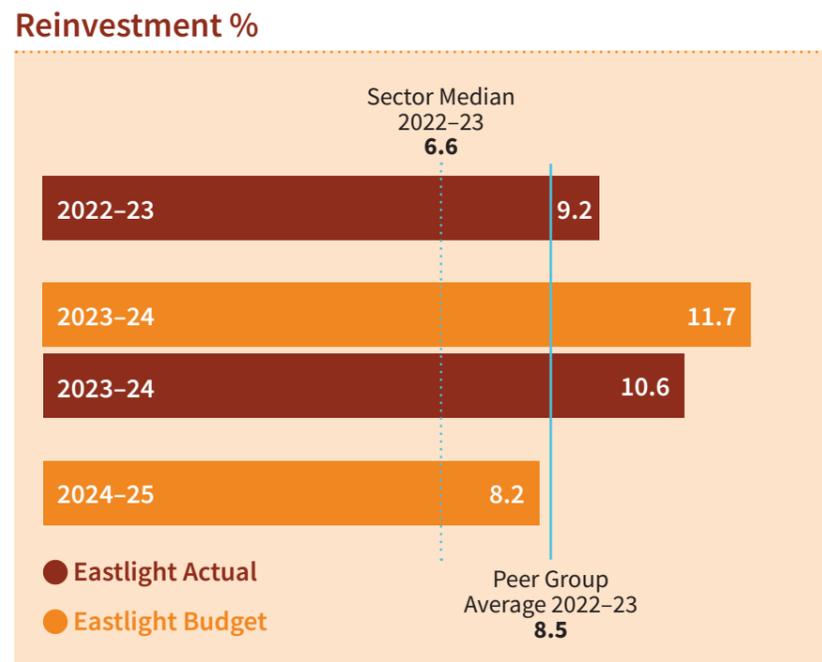
Our benchmarking is based on data sourced from the Global Accounts and Value for Money metrics reports, compiled by the Regulator of Social Housing for the year ending March 2023 (the most recent available information).

Given the continued economic pressures we have sustained over the last 12 months, we do not believe that comparing Eastlight’s current performance to its peer group in a previous year will yield a clear analysis. Hence, the analysis that follows compares Eastlight’s performance in the previous year to that of others in 2022–23. Furthermore, it compares our latest performance (2023–24) against our own results for 2022–23.

Given that both the trade press and the Regulator’s Quarterly Surveys have extensively documented the pressures faced by most associations, it is unlikely that some of the negative changes we observe in our own metrics over the past year are exclusive to Eastlight. We can only make a meaningful assessment of our latest performance against our peers when the annual accounts of all associations for 2023–24 are published.

“

We plan and execute long-term projects effectively to deliver value for money”



**What this metric means in simple terms**

This metric shows how much a housing association invests per year in improving its homes or developing new ones, compared to the total value of its properties.

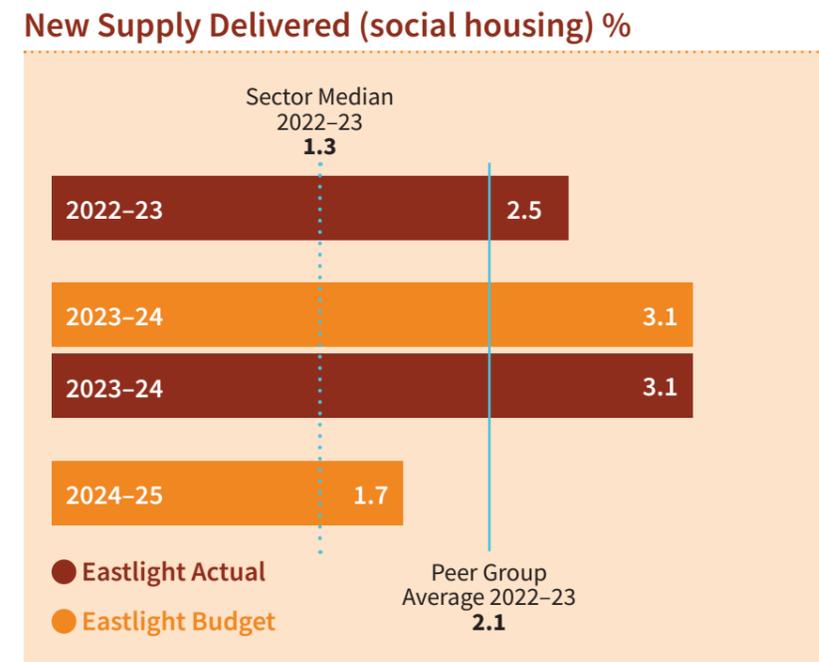
**2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like**

Our 2022-23 reinvestment rate was 9.2%. This was higher than both the sector median (6.6%) and our peer group average (8.5%).

**2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results**

Our reinvestment rate in 2023-24 increased by 1.4% to 10.6%. Although this was better than our 2022-23 result, it was lower than budgeted, as we continued to experience difficult market conditions with reduced spend on new development.

We expect our reinvestment rate to reduce slightly in the next financial year as we scale back our development programme in line with our latest business plan and invest in making our current stock more energy efficient and environmentally friendly.



**What this metric means in simple terms**

This metric measures by how much a housing association has increased its number of homes in the year, in percentage terms.

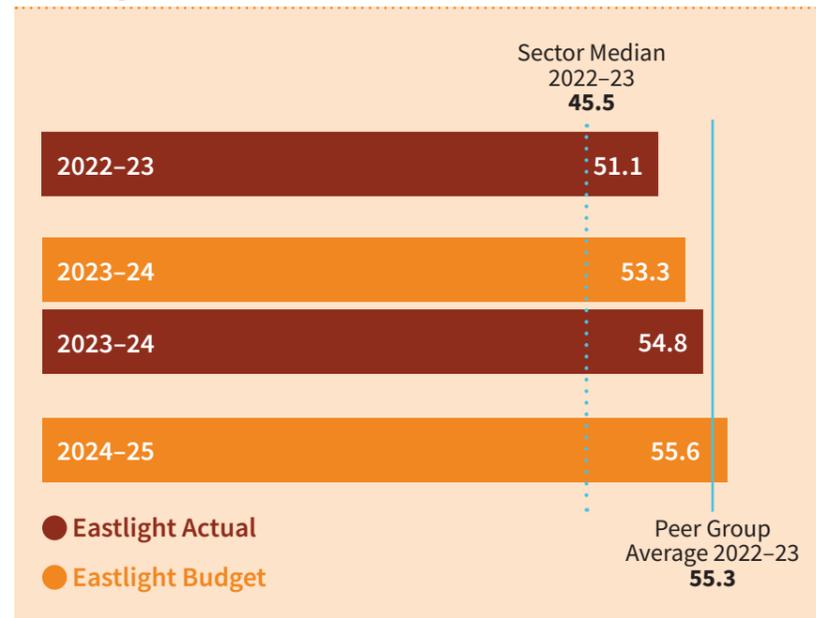
**2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like**

We completed 324 new homes in 2022-23, increasing our total number of affordable homes by 2.5%. This was higher than both the sector median (1.3%) and the peer group average (2.1%).

**2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results**

We completed 417 new homes in 2023-24, a 29% increase on the previous year. This increased our total number of affordable homes by 3.1% and we met our target for the year. We are proud of this result in the current economic climate, but our strategy to reweight investment towards existing homes and services means that, in future years, we expect to see growth of around 2.5% per year. Non-social housing new supply delivered is 0%.

### Gearing %



#### What this metric means in simple terms

This metric shows how much debt a housing association has compared to what its homes and other assets are worth. Generally, a high gearing ratio might indicate a higher level of financial risk and less capacity for the housing association to increase borrowings, but this depends on each housing association’s circumstances.

#### 2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like

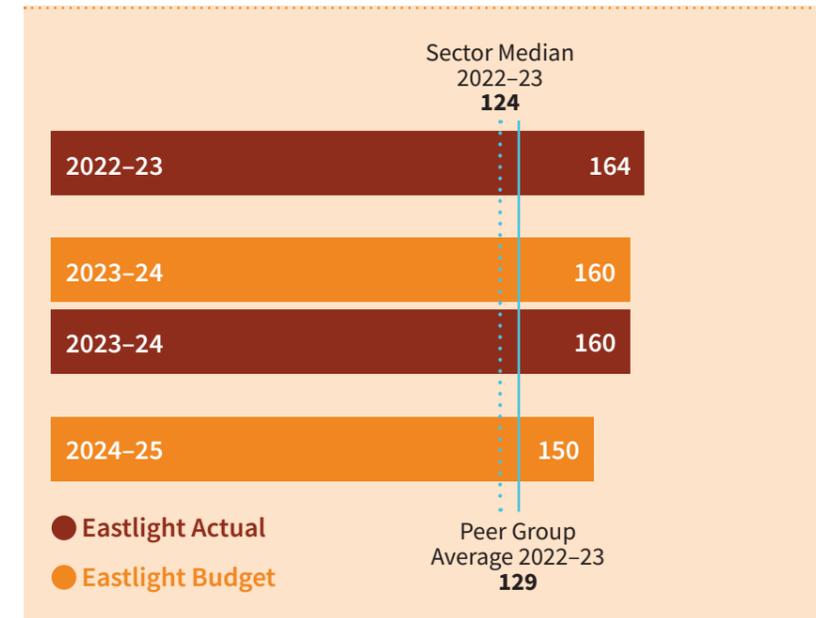
Our gearing was 51.1% at the end of 2022-23. This was lower than the peer group (55.3%) but higher than the sector median (45.5%).

#### 2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results

To continue our ambitious development programme, Eastlight needs to borrow more money to put towards the investment. This year, we followed our strategy and increased our borrowing, resulting in a higher gearing ratio of 54.8%, up by 3.7%.

Despite this increase, our borrowing capacity remains strong and healthy. Our business plan expects continued borrowing to support us in building more homes. However, we will make sure that our borrowing stays at manageable levels to preserve our financial strength and resilience.

### EBITDA MRI Interest Cover %



#### What this metric means in simple terms

This metric helps us understand a housing association’s ability to cover its interest payments using its operating income. A higher ratio indicates we are more able to cover our interest payments and is a sign of financial strength.

#### 2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like

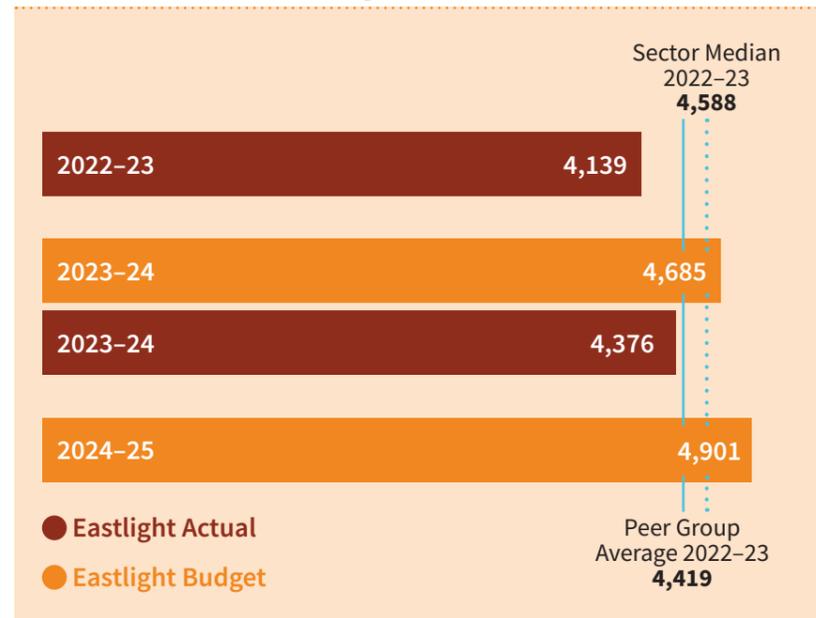
Our EBITDA-MRI interest cover was 164% in 2022-23, far stronger than both the sector median (124%) and peer group average (129%).

#### 2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results

In 2023-24, we achieved interest cover of 160%, 4% lower than the previous year. This was in line with our budget target, representing strong performance despite pressure on both operating and interest costs.

Recognising that these pressures are likely to continue, we aim to maintain an EBITDA-MRI interest cover of at least 150%, and this is a key target in our budgets and business plans. This provides us with a healthy buffer against our lenders’ requirements and ensures our financial stability.

### Headline Social Housing Cost per unit £



#### What this metric means in simple terms

This metric shows how much a housing association spends per year to manage and maintain each social housing home, allowing for overheads. Generally, a lower cost per unit suggests more efficiency.

#### 2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like

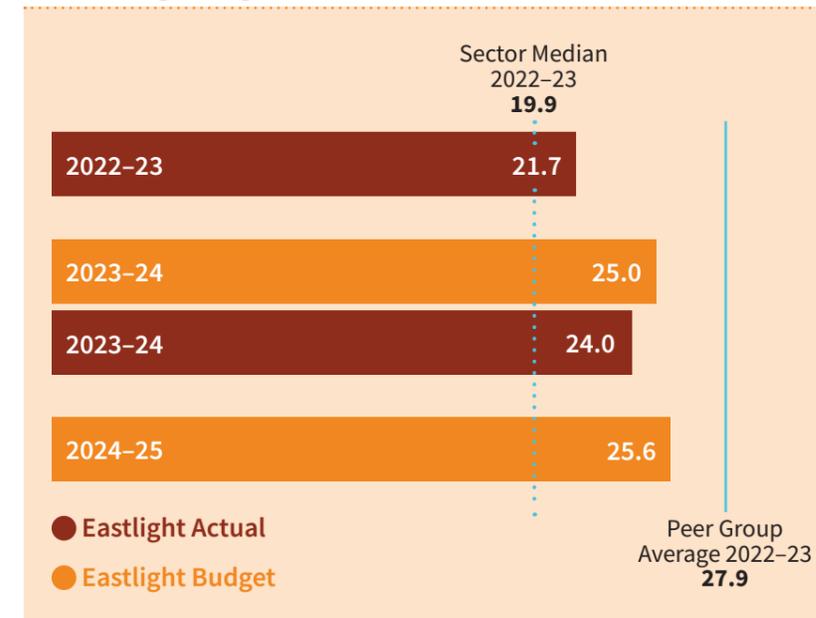
Our social housing cost per unit was £4,139 per unit in 2022-23. This was well below the sector median (£4,588) and the peer group average (£4,419).

#### 2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results

In 2023-24, we continued to see pressure on operating costs with the cost per unit rising from £4,139 in 2022-23 to £4,376. This increase was mainly due to the continued high levels of inflation affecting our key services. Additionally, labour shortages forced us to rely more on subcontractors, which increased costs. This was far lower than our budget for the year, however.

In our budget for 2024-25, we expect the cost per unit to continue rising due to our ongoing efforts to improve our homes. However, we will strive to find ways to limit these increases by identifying opportunities to save money without compromising the positive impact we make.

### Operating Margin – Overall %



#### What this metric means in simple terms

This metric helps us measure the financial performance of a housing association across all its activities, including shared ownership sales and community investment. A higher operating margin indicates we keep a higher amount of our income after deducting costs. This leaves more money to reinvest in providing better services and building or improving homes.

#### 2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like

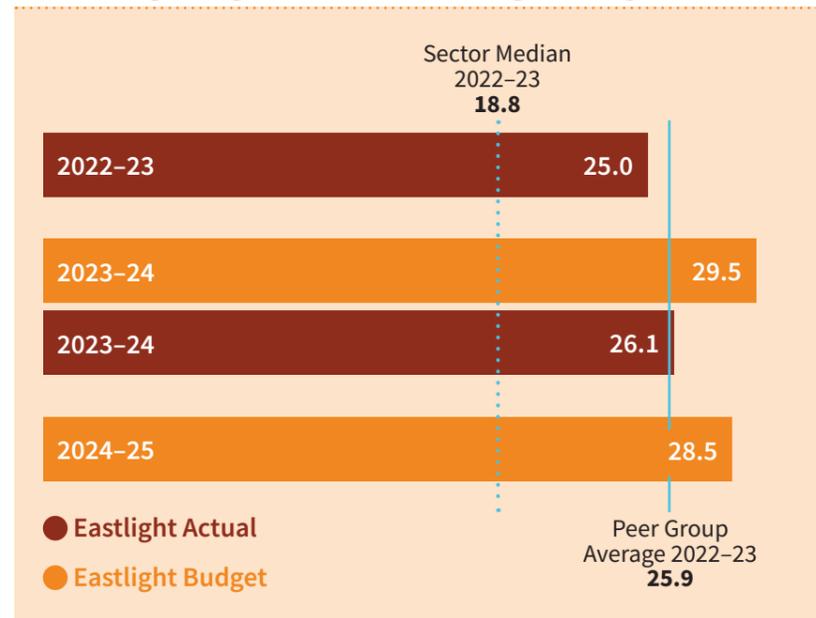
Our overall operating margin was 21.7% in 2022-23. This was slightly higher than the sector median (19.9%) but much lower than the peer group average (27.9%).

#### 2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results

In 2023-24, our overall operating margin rose by 2.3% to 24%, but short of budget of 25%. This rise was mainly due to higher rental income due to annual increases, plus additional homes from our development programme. We also tightened our scrutiny and control of operating expenditure during the year.

In our budget for 2024-25, we anticipate the overall operating margin improving to 25.6%. This allows for the April 2024 rent increase and assumes economic pressures will start to ease and that we will rely less on maintenance subcontractors.

### Operating Margin – Social Housing Lettings %



#### What this metric means in simple terms

This metric helps us measure the financial performance of a housing association’s core social housing lettings activity. A higher operating margin indicates that we keep a higher amount of our income after deducting costs. This leaves more money to reinvest in providing better services and building or improving homes.

#### 2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like

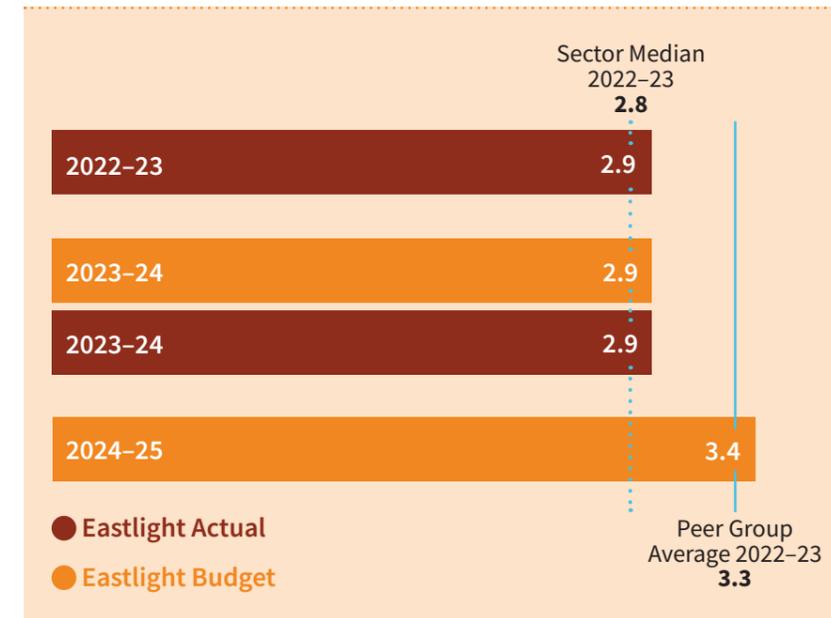
Our social housing lettings operating margin was 25% in 2022-23, well ahead of the sector median (18.8%) but slightly lower than the peer group average (25.9%).

#### 2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results

In 2023-24, our social housing lettings operating margin rose by 1.1% to 26.1%. Although an improvement, this was behind our target for the year of 29.5%. This rise was mainly due to higher rental income due to annual increases plus additional homes from our development programme. We also tightened our scrutiny and control of operating expenditure during the year.

In our budget for 2024-25, we anticipate the social housing lettings operating margin improving to 28.5%. This allows for the April 2024 rent increase and assumes economic pressures will start to ease and that we will rely less on maintenance subcontractors.

### Return on Capital Employed %



#### What this metric means in simple terms

This metric helps show how effectively a housing association drives income as a percentage of the total capital invested in the organisation. A higher return on capital employed (ROCE) indicates greater financial efficiency and effectiveness.

#### 2022-23 benchmarking – comparing like-with-like

Our ROCE was 2.9% in 2022-23, below the peer group average (3.3%) and slightly higher than the sector median (2.8%).

#### 2023-24 update – comparing Eastlight’s year-on-year results

Our ROCE in 2023-24 was 2.9%, which was the same as the prior year.

Our budget for 2024-25 expects us to maintain ROCE at 3.4%.

## Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)

### Our Environmental Efforts

Our five-year Sustainability Strategy 2022–27 sets out how we aim to build new homes and invest in our existing ones in ways that are kind to the environment. We also want to support our customers to reduce their environmental impact and help them run their homes more efficiently, reducing overall fuel poverty.

All new homes on Eastlight-led schemes will be built to the specifications as set out in our Design Guide, published in September 2022, which aims to instil ‘good design’ as a guiding principle for all aspects of a scheme’s inception, design, use and maintenance. It prioritises the customer experience and considers good design across four perspectives: the Resident, the Organisation, the Community and the Environment.

Twenty colleagues in our organisation have come together to form our team of Sustainability Champions; they meet regularly and help to combat some of the sustainability challenges prevalent in our sector, and specific to Eastlight.

Our Champions, which includes one Customer Influence Committee Member, are now fully Carbon Literate, having completed the Carbon Literacy® Toolkit for Social Housing in March 2024. This training has provided the vocabulary and education needed to both communicate climate and housing matters with stakeholders, and to better deliver innovative solutions to help reach government targets and Eastlight’s sustainability ambitions.

Within our organisation, we have also adopted changes to how we operate, including switching from brown energy to green renewable energy; moving our IT services to cloud-based solutions and offsite servers, creating an 80% carbon reduction; and prioritising low-carbon, meat-free alternatives in our catering procurement to reduce both our environmental impact and costs.

Each year, Eastlight adopts the Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing (SRS), published in November 2020. As a result, we can track our progress, benchmark against our peers and drive improvements against the latest revised framework (SRS 2.0 as at October 2023). Read more about our performance against the SRS in our dedicated ESG Report, which is published on our website: [www.eastlighthomes.co.uk](http://www.eastlighthomes.co.uk).



Eastlight’s Environmental, Social & Governance Report 2023–24



“

Eastlight’s flagship Mount Hill scheme (Halstead, Essex) built to Design Guide specifications”

## Our Social Impact

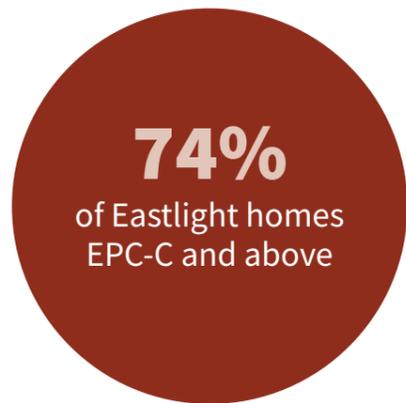
As the country's largest resident-led housing association, Eastlight's residents have the opportunity to become shareholders and are entitled to vote at our Annual General Meeting (AGM) each September and any Special General Meetings. Shareholder voting is required for rule changes, and the appointment of Board Members and auditors.

Following our Community Empowerment Strategy 2021–23, our Resident Engagement Strategy 2023–26 sets out how Eastlight will build on the work of our All In programme and other key initiatives, by enabling residents to increasingly influence our services and decision-making. This includes a new resident engagement service that brings the voice of residents and employees together to design and deliver the kinds of accessible projects and opportunities that have the most impact on Eastlight customers. It also establishes our Active Residents Network, allowing individual voices to have a bigger impact at the very top of our organisation and throughout.

Eastlight's Asset Management Strategy 2021–27 works hand-in-hand with our Sustainability Strategy 2022–27 to reduce the effect of fuel poverty on our residents, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis. Our two strategies make it clear that we work on a fabric-first approach to ensure that the home is properly insulated, and that the money spent by our customers on heating is retained within the home for as long as possible and to limit energy consumption.

At Eastlight, we ensure that our energy efficiency improvements not only result in the government's Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) points, but also benefit the customer regarding running costs.

We are evermore focused on our EPC-C and Net Zero Carbon 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) and the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) this year to trial new energy technologies and to attain funding to insulate and reduce energy use 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.



**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.”

As part of the SHIELD project, we have retrofitted and installed new technologies in two of our 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. The learnings and energy saving comparisons will go on to inform our approach to adopting similar technologies and techniques for more homes as part of our ongoing efforts with SHIELD.

Our Design Guide also 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 to directly benefit our residents. One of our 100% affordable development schemes in Elmsett will be the first scheme to fully meet the Design Guide, and the homes will have ASHPs and meet a minimum of EPC-B.

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

At April 2024, we had nine further cases under investigation from the Ombudsman for which we are still awaiting an outcome. Three of the nine cases were raised in 2022–23, with six raised in 2023–24. However, the rate at which our complaints have been escalated to the Ombudsman has decreased to 0.6% (2023: 0.9%).

“Partnerships with SHIELD and ECO4 accelerate carbon reduction efforts”

### Our Resident-led Governance Structure

Our Customer Influence Committee (CIC) is made up of Eastlight residents who scrutinise services and decision-making so that we meet our customers’ complex, ever-changing and varied needs. They also oversee Eastlight’s promises to our customers and stakeholders, including the development of our customer-facing strategies and policies.

Three members on the Committee also sit on our Board. CIC Chair Michelle Baker was a Board Member and the Senior Independent Director of the Association. Other resident Board Members include Catherine Turner, and Steve Bentall – a Trainee Board Member.

Three Eastlight residents – Runyararo Garande, Michael Ryan and Magenta Lavey – joined the CIC as Independent Committee Members, following two members resigning or completing their contract, in September 2023.

Eastlight has adopted the NHF Code of Conduct 2022 and follows the principles for the identification, declaration and management of potential conflicts of interest. The processes for managing such conflicts and related matters are included within Eastlight’s Governance Framework and Probity Policy.

Eastlight’s Board publishes a more detailed ESG Report, which can be found on our website: [www.eastlighthomes.co.uk](http://www.eastlighthomes.co.uk)



CIC and Trainee Board Member, Steve Bentall



“Three residents joined Eastlight’s Customer Influence Committee (CIC)”

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