

Summer 2022

Keeping Connected

Your newsletter

Eastlight
Community Homes



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Greetings, from Emma

“Welcome to your latest edition of Keeping Connected, your newsletter from Eastlight.

We aim for this newsletter to include information that you will find both useful and interesting. Please do let us know if there is anything else you would like to see included.

Some people are struggling to pay their bills and manage their money, as the cost-of-living sadly increases for us all. We are here for you if you need support or advice – see page 3.

We always want to hear your views on our services – whether it’s a one-off suggestion for improvement, a complaint or you wish to make a change for good in your communities. See more about the difference your feedback makes on page 5, and the launch of our exciting **ALL IN**

Alliances and Community Teams on pages 10 to 11 – with one of their focuses being to tackle the impact of the cost of living.

Thank you for your patience as we get back on track following the inevitable impact the lockdowns had on some of our services, some of which we had to put on hold

temporarily to help keep us all safe. We hope that you are already seeing things improve, or that you will soon.”

Emma Palmer

Chief Executive, Eastlight Community Homes



“It feels like we’re on holiday”

17 homes for social rent and shared ownership on a new Eastlight development in Cressing are having a life-changing impact on residents.

A resident, who lives with her partner, said: “We absolutely love it. We downsized and this house is much better than the last. It feels like we’re on holiday. Eastlight have been brilliant, really helpful. My husband is disabled and it’s a lot better for us now.



“Parking is brilliant as right outside – and there is enough room for him to get around in his wheelchair

inside. The rent is cheaper now and it’s made such a difference.”

Coping with the cost of living

The price of goods and services, such as energy, food and fuel, has increased by 9% over the past year and continue to rise - the highest rate since the 1970s. Since the price cap increased earlier this year, the average household’s fuel costs have gone up by approximately £700 per year.

We appreciate this is a worrying time for many of you. We are developing a service to support those experiencing financial hardship - in particular, those struggling with the cost of gas and

electricity. This service will launch by the end of the summer, so please look out for further details.

In the meantime, the following support is available, if you need it:

- **Household Support Fund:** This is a pot of money available via local authorities to support those experiencing financial hardship. Please contact your local authority for further information. You can also find out about other grant funding by visiting [grants-search.turn2us.org.uk](https://www.turn2us.org.uk)

- **Social tariffs:** Social tariffs are offered by energy, water and phone/ broadband providers and offer a reduced rate to eligible households. These include those aged over 60, those on means-tested benefits, and those living in fuel poverty or on a low income. If you are experiencing issues paying your energy, water or phone/ broadband bills, please contact your provider to discuss further

- **Foodbanks:** Food banks are aimed at supporting people who cannot currently afford the essentials in life. You can find your nearest foodbank by visiting www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank. We can refer you if you meet the criteria.

- **Cost of living survival guide:** Martin Lewis, Money Saving Expert, has published a cost of living survival guide, providing more than 90 ways to save money www.moneysavingexpert.com/family/cost-of-living-survival-kit



Still concerned?

If you have explored these options and you continue to have concerns about your financial situation, our Tenancy Sustainment Service and Welfare Benefits Advisors are available to provide guidance and support. Please contact us.



**Protection from abuse:
“Laura and Katee’s
help has done us the
world of good”**

Two years ago, Clare* from Halstead*, said she was “banging my head against a brick wall.”

Her daughter, an Eastlight customer who lived in Colchester* at the time, was experiencing severe mental health issues, not helped by being in an abusive relationship.

“It’s made the burden go away.”

Her partner – and father to her children – had recently gone to prison, but she was still struggling to look after herself and her children and needed her mum’s help.

As Clare was unable to drive, she had to rely on the bus to get to Colchester, which was very inconvenient and meant she couldn’t always get there in time to

deal with emergency situations – which were happening frequently.

Clare longed to live closer to her daughter but couldn’t get any authorities to listen to her and understand the difference living closer to her daughter would make. That is, until she spoke to Katee Swallow and Laura Chadwick from Greenfields Community Housing (which later merged with Colne Housing to become Eastlight).

She said: “People assume you’re deaf or stupid when it comes to mental health problems, and we were all struggling like crazy to be heard. Katee and Laura were the only people who listened and didn’t talk down to me.

“They arranged for my daughter to move to Colchester so I could support her more easily. They were outstanding and have a gift of knowing how to talk to people

“It’s changed our lives for the better.”

and deal with people with mental health issues.”

Two years on, Clare has taken the time to contact Eastlight to let us know the difference the move has made to the family’s lives. “The children are thriving since the move, and everything has fallen into place. It did us the world of good and both Laura and Katee did everything they could for us, and it’s changed our lives for the better.

“My daughter still struggles and needs me, but the move has taken a huge pressure off me – it’s made the burden go away. I can’t praise them enough.”

*name and locations have been changed.

Please contact us if you or another Eastlight resident that you know is experiencing abuse. We can provide advice and support. You can also visit www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/extra-support/domestic-abuse/ to see more about examples of abuse and support available.



How you’re shaping our service

Your feedback is extremely important to us – it helps to shape our services.

We have lots of ways that you can get in touch with us to tell us what you think, including email, text, Facebook and calling us. We’ve also increased the ways in

which we contact you to see what you think.

This includes an email or text being sent to you immediately after you call us. This helps us to understand where we are getting things right, and where we need to improve.

In the last year, we’ve received 13,000 emails or texts, rating us 5 out of 5 80% of the time – thank you! Key positive themes include how helpful, polite, and friendly you find us. When we receive less positive feedback, we’ll contact you to try to put things right.

Here are some of the things that you said, and we did!

You said:
“How can I keep a close eye on my energy usage when I move?”

We did:
We now give every new customer a meter key when they move into their new home.

You said:
“The operative didn’t wear foot protection when entering my home.”

We did:
We now ensure all of our vehicles are stocked with shoe covers, as well as mats to protect your homes as we carry out work.

You said:
“I don’t want you to call me during my working hours as its not convenient for me to speak.”

We did:
We’ve now arranged to communicate with this resident via email, for their convenience.



Contact us to let us know how else we can improve.



Community improvements chosen by you

Did you know that Eastlight has three resident groups who are given annual budgets to spend on small changes that make a big difference to your communities?

Thank you to all our resident volunteers who take the time to help us decide how to spend the three pots of money. This year, £60,000 was spent on funding lots of projects, ranging from installing benches to paying for a national youth rugby tour.

Creative children transform garages with new mural

Earlier this year, our Eastlight Resident Group (North) provided funding for students from Earls Colne Primary School and Ramsey Academy in Halstead to transform a mural on a garage site in Earls Colne.

The project was led by Eastlight and part-funded by developer, Bell Group, which supplied paint, materials and labour and also help to build and maintain our homes.

Jenny Gerrard, Technology Curriculum Leader at The

Ramsey Academy, said: "Our Year 9 students thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the mural project. It was wonderful for the students, parents and school to see how their early ideas developed and were brought to life in such a special way."



Reconnection following lockdowns

Teachers and students at John Ray Infants school in Braintree were very pleased to receive funding for the second year running from ERG (Mid) to further improve their outside learning environment.

Among the new additions, the school now has a water wall within their water area, an area for the use of scooters, bikes and small games, a sand area and a mud kitchen. Additional funding will go towards toys, bikes, helmets and more.

A representative from the school said: "Please accept the sincere thanks from all of the children and staff for your generous donation. We have been encouraging the children to use their motor skills by digging in both the sand area and the mud kitchen, as it has been noticeable how many have underdeveloped strength due to the time missed outside and at school during the lockdowns. A wider range of digging resources would help them use their skills."



Tour tackled thanks to funding!

£4,500 from ERG (Mid) helped young people from all financial backgrounds to take part in the national youth rugby tour to Cardiff in April this year. Daniel Cole, a Head Coach for the under 14's team at Braintree Rugby Club, said:

"A huge thank you to Eastlight! The money went towards a

personal shirt for each player, coach hire and a ticket each to watch Newport Dragons vs Gloucester. For many, it was their first-time experiencing being on a rugby tour and will be a special memory for a long time. They keep asking when we're touring again!"



Mass litter pick across communities



Last year, seven spring cleans were carried out on five estates across Essex, which were all funded by our resident groups. The events focussed on litter picking and were held in Halstead, Witham and Braintree. More than 100 bags of rubbish were collected in total, as well as a skip-full of waste at each event.

Mary Beckett, an Eastlight volunteer resident from Witham

who took part in the event on Forest Road, said: "It was brilliant! It wasn't really hard work, although there was quite a bit of walking. Lots of people who saw us came out to tell us what a great job we were doing, which was very encouraging."

If you need funding for your community project, contact Eastlight to see if we're able to support you.

YOUR VOICE

New additions to your committee

Thank you to everyone who applied to be a member of our Customer Influence Committee (CIC) earlier this year. We received some fantastic and varied applications.

The committee is part of our governance structure accountable to our Board. It supports the Board so that Eastlight residents truly influence decision-making.

Welcome to our new members, who include:



Catherine Turner
(associate Board member)

Catherine enjoys being in a group working towards a common goal for the community. She believes we can learn from people of different ages and experience to make our efforts stronger.

Catherine has specific expertise in access and equality. She has advised Colchester and Ipswich Museums on accessibility, and has been a web accessibility consultant and an Assistive Technology trainer.



Craig Clackett

Craig is a single father of four daughters, a retired electrician and a tutor who lives in Sudbury.

He is particularly enthusiastic about sustainability and technology issues.



Steve Bentall
(trainee Board member)

Steve has worked in physical activity and health for more than 30 years. He currently works for Fusion Lifestyle, a leisure contractor operating over 30 sites in the UK.

Steve is the company's Sports and Community Development Manager for Essex, covering their three local authority areas. He works with stakeholders to ensure there are inclusive physical activity opportunities for communities.

Visit www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/about-us/customer-influence to see all of our committee members.

Surveying the crowd

In April and May, we asked you to tell us how you feel about Eastlight and where we should target improvements.

Thanks to the 1,400 who responded – we look forward to sharing the results with you soon.

Look out for emails and texts between August and October, asking you for information about what's important to you and your family, to help us to get to know you better and improve our services.



Signs of the times

Several of you have contacted us to ask about the signage across our estates, which still include Greenfields and Colne logos from before the merger into Eastlight. During the pandemic, we did not want to increase risk by sending our teams out to estates for non-urgent work, but with restrictions lifted and our maintenance teams now back in full swing, we'll begin updating the signs this summer.

To make sure this work doesn't reduce our ability to complete repairs or maintenance work, we will be using an external contractor to replace signs and remove those no longer needed.



Gas Safety contractor update:

From 1 August, PH Jones will be the gas safety contractor for all your homes; carrying out repairs and services, where needed.





New alliances will make a difference in our communities

If you want to make a difference in your community but don't know where to start, then join one of our Community Alliances!

They are an opportunity for residents – Eastlight customers and the wider community – to connect again after years of isolation during the pandemic.

The first two meet-ups in Colchester and Halstead have been a huge success, and we will shortly have three more events in Silver End, Witham and Braintree.

Those attending will get to know like-minded people over some locally sourced food and drink, discover some inspiring examples of communities

in action and then agree how they will make their neighbourhood an even better place to call home.

The alliances form part of **ALL IN**, our major new community programme to put power in the hands of the local people who understand their communities better than anyone.

Rue Garande, Community Empowerment Officer, said: "If you've ever wanted to make a difference in your community but don't know where to start, then please come along to our first Community Alliance meet-ups.

"While we'll provide the venue, some funding and of course, the refreshments, you will get to decide what actions you and your community will take.

To find out more, please visit www.weareallin.co.uk



Next meetings

Silver End: Saturday, 30 July, 2pm – 4pm, Silver End Village Hall

Witham: Saturday, 6 August, 2pm – 4pm, Dengie Hall

Braintree: Saturday, 13 August, 2pm – 4pm, Glebe Community Hall



Meet the Community Teams tackling the big issues

FOUR ALL IN Community Teams have begun dedicating a year of their lives to creating a big idea tackling a social issue affecting our communities.

This summer, they are out and about in your community and would love to meet you if you're affected by one of these issues, or you're doing something to tackle it:

- **Braintree** – mental health
- **Colchester** – cost of living
- **Halstead** – opportunities for young people
- **Witham** – social isolation

Discover what they are up to at www.weareallin.co.uk or email the teams at community@eastlighthomes.co.uk

"Together, we are the change we've been waiting for."

Concerned you're being scammed?

Scam artists, sometimes known as bogus callers, are criminals who advertise fake services or products that aim to exploit you financially or collect your personal information.

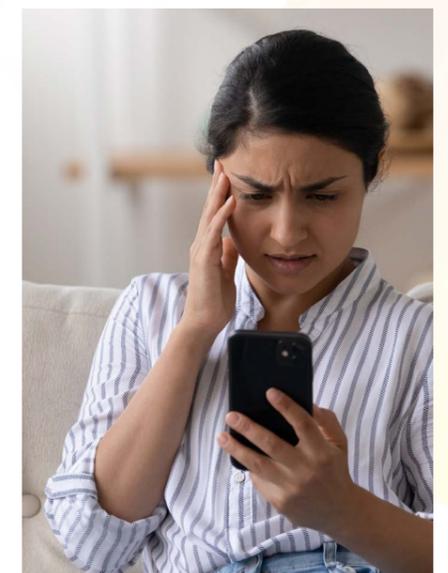
They typically target people through emails, letters, phone or text, and some may even turn up at your door. They succeed because they look and sound legitimate.

If you think someone is trying to scam or defraud you, please report it to Action Fraud on **0300 123 2040**. If it concerns your

home, such as someone saying they are from Eastlight but you aren't sure, please contact us (feel free to hang up and call us to check if they are legitimate).

We will never ask you for your personal information or bank details, and will also show identification when visiting you.

More advice to help you to be alert to scammers can be found at: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/extra-support/money-advice/ but please do call us if you are concerned. We are here for you.





About Shared Ownership



Shared Ownership means that you buy a share of a property and pay rent to a landlord on the rest. It allows you to get on the property ladder as an owner-occupier, offering long-term stability without overstressing yourself. Deposits are generally lower than buying on the open market.



Shared Ownership makes mortgages more accessible, even if you're on a lower wage.

Eastlight is building hundreds of homes across Essex and beyond, with many of these available for shared ownership.

Increasing your share

Once you have lived in your home for a period of time, you have the opportunity to purchase further shares in your home, which is known as staircasing.

The more shares you purchase in your home the less rent you will pay. If you staircase to 100%, where the lease allows, you become the outright owner, and if this is a house, the freehold will transfer to you. At this point rent will no longer be charged.



If you are interested in finding out more about purchasing a shared ownership home from Eastlight, or you're already a shared owner looking to staircase, visit: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/my-home/shared-owners/, email: Shared.Ownership@eastlighthomes.co.uk or contact us.

- Call:** 0330 128 0330 (local rate)
- Text:** 07860 024 511
- Email:** customer.services@eastlighthomes.co.uk
- Write to:** Eastlight House, Charter Way, Braintree, Essex, CM77 8FG
- Visit:** www.eastlighthomes.co.uk

-  facebook.com/eastlighthomes
-  instagram.com/eastlighthomes
-  twitter.com/eastlighthomes
-  linkedin.com/company/eastlight-community-homes-

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

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

