

Annual Report for our customers

For the year ended 31 March 2023



*Resident-led
in everything
we do*



Eastlight resident
Shereen Faure and
her two children

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“Hello” from Hattie and Emma



H Llewelyn-Davies.

Hattie Llewelyn-Davies
Chair of Board
Eastlight Community Homes

Welcome to this year’s Annual Report, which provides an in-depth look at Eastlight Community Homes’ work between April 2022 and March 2023.

The last year has been a challenge for many. Soaring inflation has exacerbated the cost-of-living crisis, and at Eastlight, much of our focus has been on supporting residents living in the 12,450 homes we manage.

Throughout the year, we provided 1,075 residents with money and employment advice and secured more than £800,000 for those who needed guidance around claiming benefits. In October 2022, we started a cost-of-living campaign, which included a 24/7 Tenant Support and Wellbeing Service, short term financial support and advice to manage your bills.

Local residents have the best ideas for solving the big issues affecting our communities, which is why we launched our trailblazing All In programme last year. In June 2022, 20 residents from Braintree, Colchester, Halstead and Witham dedicated a year to creating a bold solution to a major social issue before making it happen.

These solutions are now improving lives within our communities and are providing money confidence during the cost-of-living crisis, boosting mental wellbeing, encouraging positivity around periods and helping young people overcome social isolation.

As a resident-led housing association, we know that you understand your homes and communities better than anyone else.



This is why, in February 2023, we ran our first in-person Resident Academy, an opportunity for 20 residents to get a peek under the hood of Eastlight and learn anything they need to shape Eastlight for the better.

A group of residents who are already influencing your services from Eastlight are our Customer Influence Committee, and you can find out more about their work on page 10 of this report.

2022–23 was a landmark year for our organisation, with our Development Team delivering 324 new affordable homes for households who need them. This is the most we’ve ever completed, and a big step forward in terms of us helping to tackle the housing crisis in the region.

Our Succeed at Eastlight recruitment programme also gathered pace, with us offering more opportunities to people who want to develop different skills, are considering a career change, or entering the world of work for the first time (see page 22 for more information).

Meanwhile, our work to ensure we provide quality, accessible homes to all residents included our partnership with disability organisation Purple and our sponsorship of LGBTQIA+ Pride events across the East of England.

On **page 24**, you can see how we spend every £1 of the rent you pay to us.

As we face more challenging times, we at Eastlight continue to bring our residents on board as we create affordable homes and great neighbourhoods for you and your communities now, and for generations to come.



EPalmer

Emma Palmer
Chief Executive Officer
Eastlight Community Homes



Eastlight

in numbers



753
homes let



1,482
homes received major investment



182
new bathrooms



218
new kitchens



144
window installations



478
new boilers and other heating systems



31,638
responsive repairs



683
aids and adaptations



14,286
number of emails
received from
customers



118,154
number of calls
received from
customers



612
complaints



0
Housing Ombudsman
determinations

Keeping you safe



Eastlight’s Housing Team has an important role to play in promoting the welfare of children and adults at risk of harm. During 2022–23, they resolved 473 reports of antisocial behaviour and provided specialist help to 94 people affected by domestic abuse.

Our Estates Safety Team ensured communal areas were clear of fire hazards; meanwhile, our inhouse Home Solutions Team, which carries out repairs and maintenance on your homes, completed more than 30,000 repairs.

Eastlight listened to your feedback about the length of time you sometimes waited for jobs to be done after you had reported them to us, and we have introduced a series of changes aimed at increasing the speed at which we complete repairs to your homes.

Our investment in major works to your homes totalled £7.6m and we maintained 100% compliance with the Decent Homes Standard, which is set by the Government and defines the minimum standards social homes are required to meet.

The team was kept busy improving homes’ energy efficiency and installing 478 boilers and other heating systems, 218 kitchens, 144 windows, 182 bathrooms and 40 roofs. We also helped many residents maintain their independence by installing aids and adaptations, including 351 bathroom alterations, 62 kitchen adaptations and 167 grab rails.

One hundred per cent of our Fire Risk Assessments were in-date, and we achieved 99.01% gas safety compliance. We have not been able to gain access to a small number of homes, and this is a problem we are working hard to address.

In September 2022, we launched our Sustainability Strategy 2022–27, which explains how we are going to reduce our carbon emissions – as well as your energy bills – by bringing all our homes to Energy Performance Certificate C (EPC C) by 2030. We are already making great progress – by March 2023, more than two-thirds (68%) were already at this level or higher. All the new homes we build have an energy efficiency rating of at least EPC B.



100%

compliance with the
Decent Homes
Standard



100%

in-date Fire Risk
Assessments



99.01%

gas safety
compliance



68%

of homes EPC C
or above



473

reports of antisocial
behaviour resolved



94

people provided with
specialist help around
domestic abuse

Doing what's right

For a variety of reasons, including the huge increase in energy bills, we received more than 1,000 requests for support to manage damp and mould in your homes last year. This was a massive increase on the previous year when we received 379 requests.

In response, our Home MOT team – whose jobs normally involve visiting our residents' homes to proactively identify and carry out repairs and maintenance before the work becomes urgent – stepped in to help carry out initial mould cleans, take damp readings and check ventilation.

Their quick response and willingness to take on new responsibilities meant that these visits were carried out, on average, within 12 working days. In around one in three cases, they arranged follow-on work including repairs or the installation of new equipment.

Giving us feedback

Everyone at Eastlight is committed to providing you with excellent services, and we love to hear positive stories like Perry's (see page 9). However, we also want to know when we fall short, so we can make improvements. Full details of how to give us feedback or to make a complaint are on our website: www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/feedback-complaints

If you remain unhappy after we've reviewed your complaint, you will be given details of how to report it to the Housing Ombudsman, which exists to investigate complaints and resolve disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of housing associations and local authorities. We are pleased to report that Eastlight did not receive any Housing Ombudsman determinations in 2022–23.

1,182

requests for damp and
mould support last year
(October 2022 –
March 2023)

“

I was in temporary accommodation for seven months and it was very difficult on my mental health – it wasn't a home. When Eastlight got in contact with me about this place, my entire life changed within a week. I cannot explain the significance of having a safe affordable place to call my home.”

Perry Collins



Holding

Eastlight to account



Michelle Baker
Chair
Customer Influence Committee

My name is Michelle Baker, and I am an Eastlight resident, a Board Member, and Chair of Eastlight's Customer Influence Committee (CIC).

The CIC formed in May 2021 and is part of the organisation's governance structure and is accountable to the Board. It consists of up to ten Eastlight residents who are paid to oversee and support the Board so that residents can influence decision-making and hold Eastlight to account for the decisions they make that affect us.

Specifically, we scrutinise Eastlight's service delivery, community empowerment, asset management and the delivery of new homes. Each one of us has a key area of responsibility – whether it be safeguarding, the cost-of-living, complaints handling or communications – and we are all equally focused on making sure that Eastlight acts in our best interests.

In the past year, we've refreshed and shaped Eastlight's Complaints and Resolutions Policy, reviewed the organisation's Resident Engagement Strategy and brought three new residents onto the Committee who will help us keep Eastlight resident focused.

Sometimes, we get involved in Eastlight's trailblazing work, such as our partnership with disability organisation Purple, through which we bring together lived experiences, expertise and data to help drive disability inclusion and equality for our residents. You may have seen us at All In events, empowering Eastlight residents to make their voice heard and make a difference in our local communities.

Other times, we are involved in making very difficult decisions. For example, in November 2022, we backed the decision to increase Eastlight's rents by 7%, which was in line with most housing associations and the maximum increase allowed under the rent cap imposed by the Government.

We hold Eastlight to account for every pound they receive from us, to ensure it's going towards the things we need and want, like improved services, faster and more efficient repairs, and reducing the amount of time it takes the Eastlight team to re-let homes. There were 575 homes that were unoccupied at some point during 2022-23, and it took the team an average of 32 days to let them to new residents. This isn't good enough.

Myself and other CIC members are always keen to speak to as many fellow residents as possible, and we also try to get out and about in the housing sector to share Eastlight's governance model, demonstrating the power of being a resident on a landlord's Board, to other housing associations across the East of England and beyond.

Please look out for more opportunities to get involved with us on the Eastlight website or contact Customer Services (see the back page of this report for the contact details) if you want to speak with us about any of the work we're doing and how you can help.

“
We are always keen to speak to as many fellow residents as possible”



More ways to get involved

Eastlight Residents Groups

These groups are made up of volunteers who have the power and funding to introduce real improvements to the communities they call home. They meet monthly and identify the improvements needed in their local areas.



Our All In Alliances run in Braintree, Colchester, Halstead and Witham in Essex. They are open to anyone who wants to make a difference in their community and help people connect with their neighbours, create lasting networks and identify ways of changing their communities for the better.

Eastlight supports the Alliances by providing venues, organisation, funding and refreshments for the quarterly Alliance meetings.

During 2022–23, 332 members of our communities attended the meetings. Eastlight provided £12,000 in small community grants to the local organisations that attendees believed would be able to help deliver on the actions agreed during their discussions.



In February 2023, we held the first Resident Academy boot camp at Wivenhoe House Hotel; an opportunity to spend a weekend learning how Eastlight works and discover how residents have the power to ensure you get the homes and services you need.

The Resident Academy experience is now available via an online course aimed at giving you the information you need to shape Eastlight's future. You can find the first course here:

www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/resident-academy.

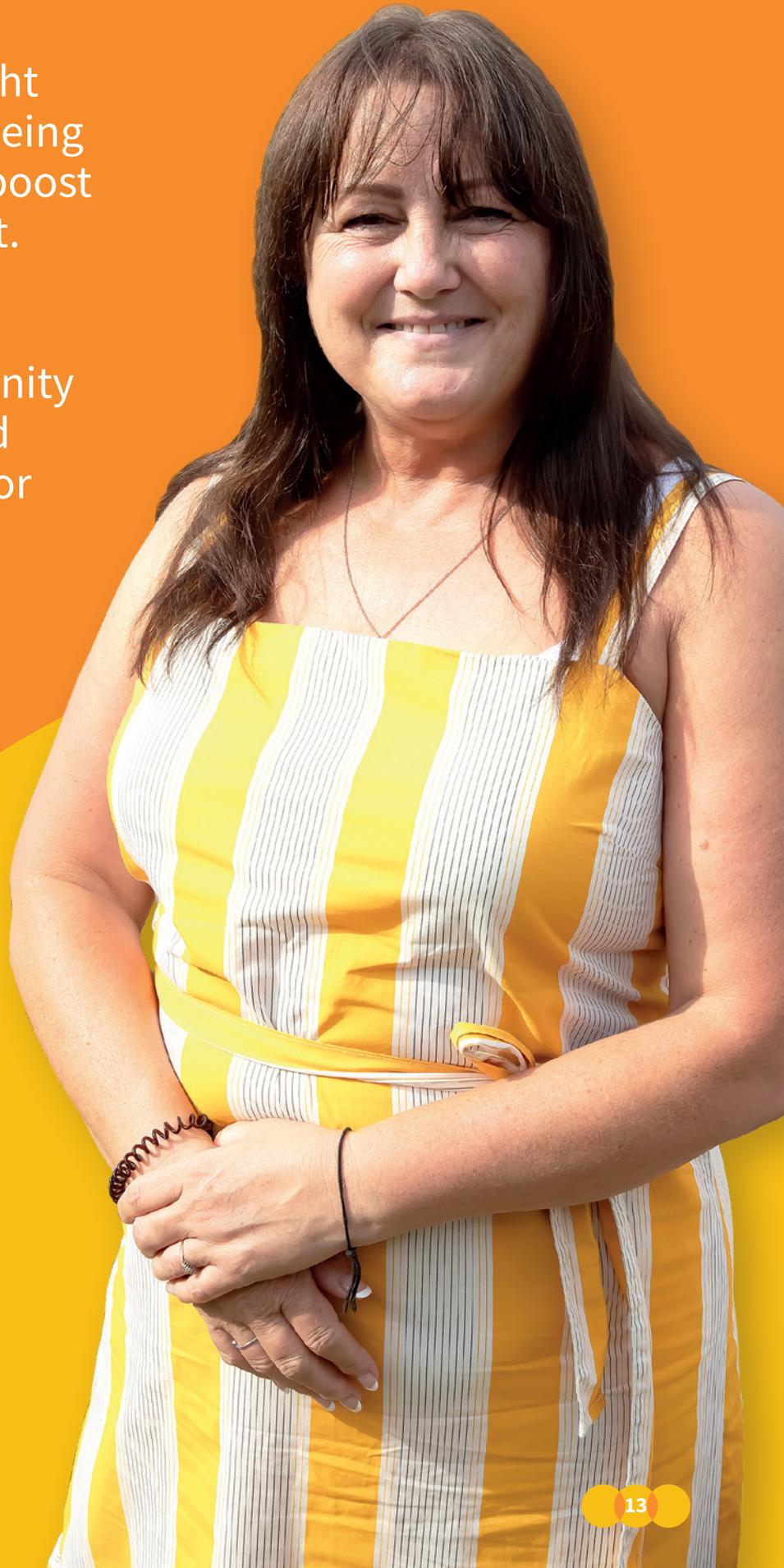
To access future courses, please email community@eastlighthomes.co.uk



“

My opinion of Eastlight has elevated since seeing the work they do to boost resident involvement. I joined the Resident Academy because it gave me the opportunity to voice opinions and influence decisions for other residents.”

Lisa Harper



We're ALL IN



Between June 2022 and June 2023, Eastlight paid 20 Essex residents a full-time salary so they could dedicate a year of their lives to one goal: creating a bold solution to tackling a major social issue and making it happen.

They were taking part in All In, the UK's first full-time community incubator, through which Eastlight puts power in the hands of residents so they can introduce the changes they know are needed in their communities.

We believe that the people living in our homes and communities know them best, and are therefore best placed to come up with the solutions needed on the ground. That's why we created the All In programme.

From a blank piece of paper, four teams created four inspiring and sustainable programmes, including Kinder Minds, a wellbeing programme providing support to residents struggling with their mental health, and Trusted, a money confidence programme whose first 10 participants made savings of over £40,000 in just six weeks.

Trusted

The Colchester team wanted to give people the confidence they need to address and manage their finances, reduce everyday stresses that money can cause, and give people back the time they usually spend stressing about their money.

Through the Trusted initiative, they've increased residents' knowledge on managing their personal finances. It involves groups of residents sharing advice and discussing options together.

GROW with the FLOW

When the Halstead team discovered that 85% of girls have tried to hide the fact that they are on their period from those around them, they set out on a mission to boost young women's confidence, nurture their understanding of menstrual health and grow a period positive community.

Through a series of workshops at local schools, the team created an ever-growing network of 'Flow Sisters' who go on to support their friends and peers.

In March 2023, members of the Grow with the Flow team were invited to Number 10 Downing Street to mark International Women's Day.

Members of the All In team at 10 Downing Street (left) and in Colchester conducting research (right).



popcorn

Popcorn was formed by the Witham team after they discovered that social isolation most affected teenagers who had become isolated studying at home while schools were closed during the pandemic. The programme aimed to support young people who would like to connect with others in their local area to discuss the things that matter most to them.

Popcorn's facilitated six-week programme provides young people with a safe social space to meet other residents of a similar age.

Kinder Minds

The Braintree team knew that people in their community were looking to connect with others and develop skills to support their mental health but were struggling to find a place to do so.

That's why they created spaces where people can come together and enjoy mindful activities to support their mental wellbeing. Kinder Minds' activities are a great way to meet new people and gain a new level of mindfulness.

The Popcorn team prepares for an All In event (left) and the Kinder Minds team launch their brand (right).



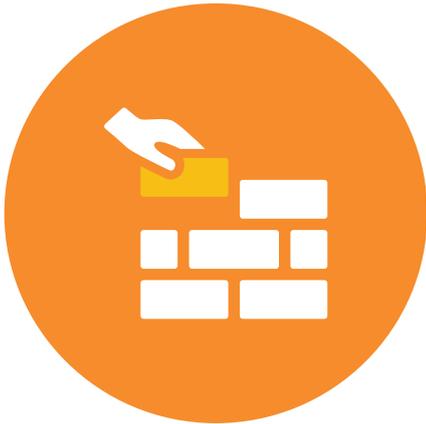
“

The All In project gave me the opportunity to fulfil a dream that I probably would have never been able to do by myself, and I'm grateful for that. It's made a big difference to my life and has given me the confidence to believe in myself a bit more.”

Gemma Griffin



Building new homes



We are living in a housing crisis. In Essex alone, 18,861 households are on local authority waiting lists, hoping to be allocated an affordable home (March 2023). Every year, we build new homes to provide a safe and comfortable roof over the head of as many households as we can.

Eastlight handed over the keys to 324 brand new homes during the year 2022–23, 15 (5%) of which were for social rent, 193 (60%) were for affordable rent, and 116 (35%) were for shared ownership.

We sold 113 shared ownership homes, with buyers, on average, opting to purchase 43% of their homes at the outset, while paying rent on the remaining 57%.

In March 2023, we were in contract or on-site with another 923 new homes, and we have another 257 in our plans for the years to come.

In September 2022, we published our own Design Guide, which outlined Eastlight’s ambitious standards for the design of our homes and neighbourhoods.

The Guide is used by the Eastlight team, as well as our consultants and contractors, and focuses on how design has a positive impact on physical and mental health, as well as the ways it can improve community ties and reduce antisocial behaviour. It puts residents’ experiences at the forefront of decision-making, with an emphasis on building communities and protecting biodiversity, so that local people, the environment, and local wildlife can thrive together in the long term.



324

new homes delivered



15

for social rent



193

for affordable rent



116

shared ownership



923

homes on-site
or in contract



257

more in our
development
pipeline

Leading the delivery of affordable homes

Our Mount Hill development will provide 71 affordable homes for households in Halstead.

Working with our partners, we secured the site to ensure all homes are affordable instead of most being made available on the private market. Four will be available for social rent; 12 for affordable rent (capped at 80% of the market value); and 55 for shared ownership.

Mount Hill is being delivered in line with Eastlight's Design Guide, meaning the new homes will be larger than most new-build homes and will be energy efficient. The first homes are due to be completed shortly and the development will be complete next year.

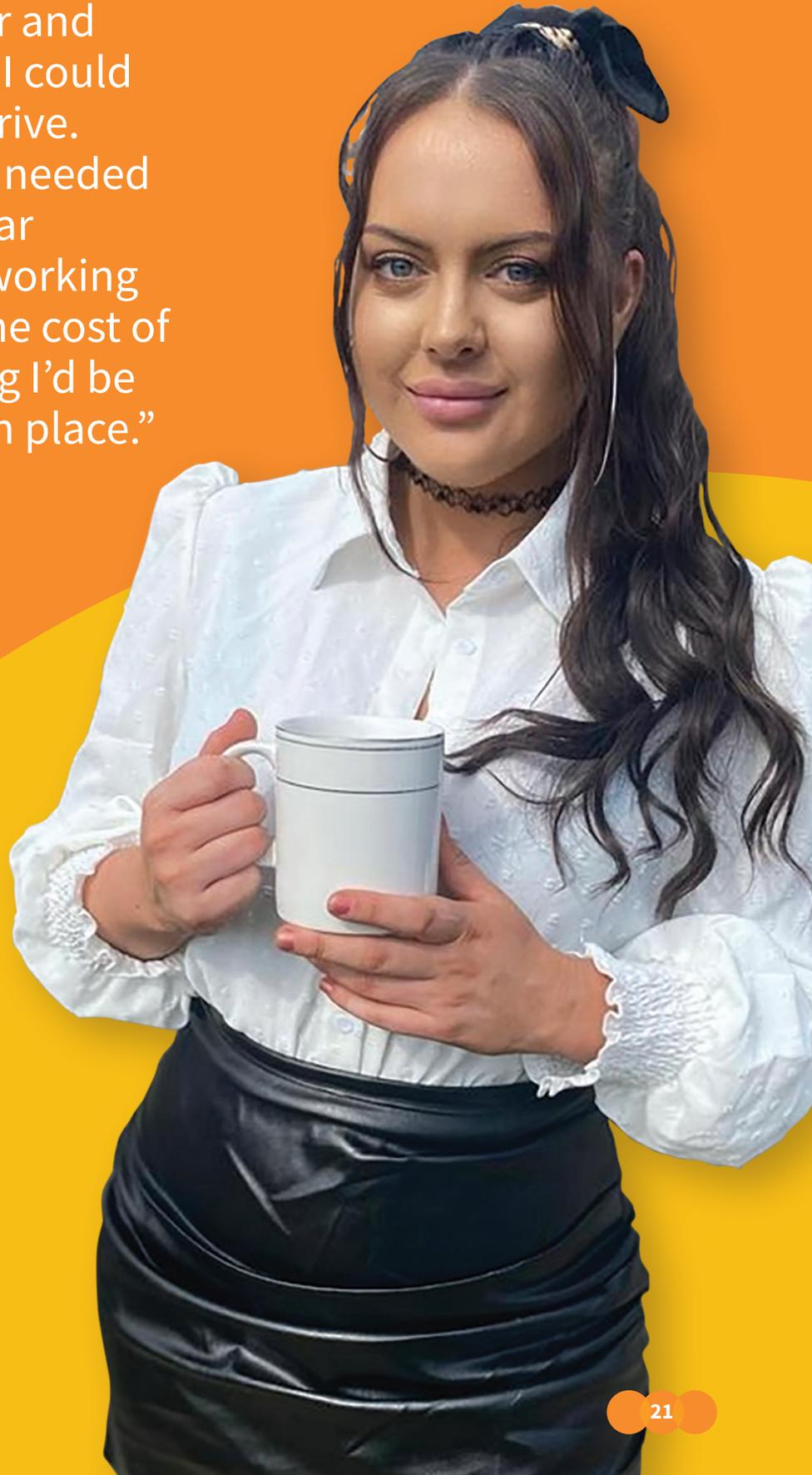
Mount Hill in Halstead, Essex.



“

I was on the housing waiting list for around a year and was limited to what I could accept as a I don't drive. More properties are needed for people in a similar position to myself, working full time but, with the cost of living, never thinking I'd be able to be in my own place.”

Natasha Pryke



Succeed

@ Eastlight



We launched our Succeed at Eastlight programme in January 2022 to welcome individuals of all ages, walks of life and stages in their career to learn new skills, receive on-the-job training and a professional qualification, which will later lead to a permanent full-time position within Eastlight.

We have shaped a relaxed, values-based recruitment process so that our trainees can acquire the technical knowledge, skills and experiences needed to thrive in their roles, whatever their employment history.

All that we ask is that our people are ambitious, for themselves, our residents and communities; inclusive, in the way they collaborate; and accountable, as they deliver on our commitments.

Successful recruits include Liam Williams, who recently gained a full-time position in our Customer Services Team after graduating the programme and achieving his CIH Level 2 in Housing. Looking back on his apprenticeship, he said:

“I’ve been welcomed into the company by such a warm and friendly community. Everyone has been so supportive and helped me become the Eastlight employee I am today.”

During 2022–23, we took on nine new Succeed at Eastlight trainees, many of whom are either residents themselves or are residents’ friends and family members.

Catherine Sharpe, our Trainee Performance & Data Administrator, said: “When the Succeed at Eastlight programme came around, it looked amazing. It’s given me the chance to progress personally and professionally, and even complete a Data Technician Apprenticeship course.”

Current Trainee People Assistant, Maddie Harrison, said: “I am enjoying learning many different things about how different departments work. Everyone at Eastlight is so friendly and helpful, and all my co-workers have made me feel so welcome. Everyone is hardworking and they all work as a team to keep each other motivated.”

Look out for Succeed at Eastlight opportunities at www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/succeed



492
employees



9
apprentices employed
during 2022-23



2 hubs
Eastlight House
in Braintree and
Marks Tey

Trainees:
Janette Sheldon,
Michael Bennett,
Alex Nightingale.



How we used your rent

How we spend every £1 of the rent you pay to us



24p

Management



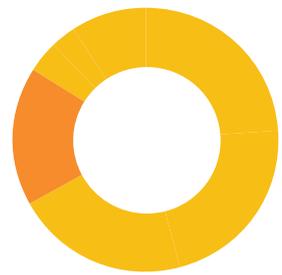
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Maintaining existing homes



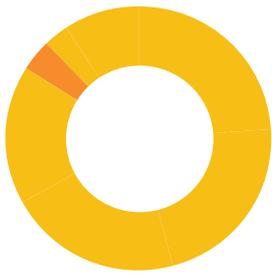
21p

Improving existing homes



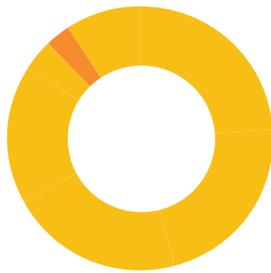
17p

Paying interest



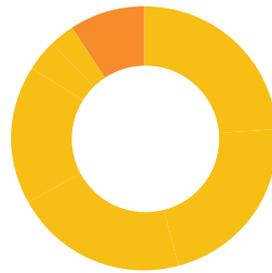
4p

Other costs



3p

Investing in communities



9p

Surplus - recycled into helping build new homes

Eastlight Community Homes

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