

Blog

The Housing Quality Network

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Opinion: Time to be trailblazing

By Emma Palmer, Chief Executive, Eastlight Community Homes

The publication of the Social Housing White Paper may have been a long time coming, but that doesn't make it any less significant for Eastlight Community Homes, and the whole housing sector.

This government's report is, first and foremost, about ensuring the safety and security of social housing tenants following the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017. It's about rebuilding tenants' trust in their landlords. As a sector, we know we still have a great deal of work to do, and the White Paper is a significant step forward.

At Eastlight, we're pleased to be able to say that our approach is already largely in line with the government's requirements – we involve residents in assessing our compliance with consumer standards and openly communicate our fire safety responsibilities with them. Of course, we want to do more, and we're continuously listening to residents to ensure we meet their needs.

The White Paper will bring changes that we're already well placed to make, and we're ready to share our progress with other housing providers and support them in whatever way we can.

In August, more than 1,000 residents and many of our teams took part in a survey which asked what matters most to them. The results mirror the government's findings about the issues most important to residents up and down the country.

The White Paper emphasises energy efficiency – our residents told us this is a focus for them, as well as the 'whole cost' of living in their homes.

Whilst traditional services like repairs are important to our residents, the ability to have their say is a high priority – second only to health and wellbeing support.

What comes through loud and clear in the government's White Paper is the emphasis on tenant voice. We are already able to demonstrate the value of having our resident shareholders there to help steer our organisation; and we're well aware that the way we consulted with residents in preparation for our merger was what really drove the process and made it possible to launch Eastlight in the middle of the first national lockdown.

As a trailblazing community gateway, we continue to push ahead and demonstrate what can be achieved when landlords work together with their tenants in a climate of trust and equality.

While we're still very much in the grips of a global pandemic, we now have the benefit of everything we've already learned about communicating with residents virtually. Just this week we've completed the Future of Eastlight Festival, a series of online events which enabled residents to see our strategic plans. Our teams will help us progress further at our People's Festival in December.

As highlighted in the government's White Paper, building houses is about creating communities, and this chimes with Eastlight's commitment to not only deliver new homes but also create thriving communities.

Having listened to our residents we know that affordability – particularly in the wake of the coronavirus crisis – is what really matters.

While we digest the detail in the White Paper, and wait for the regulatory landscape to shift accordingly, there's plenty Eastlight will be addressing. Our priority is providing the safe homes and neighbourhoods we know our residents and communities in the East of England want and need.