ESAN

The Essential Services Access Network

3-Year Strategy (2026–2029)



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Vision

Everyone can access the essential services they need regardless of income or personal circumstances — to live safely, stay healthy, and take part in society with dignity.

Mission

To amplify the consumer voice — including lesser-heard voices — in decision-making across water, energy, telecoms and financial services. We do this by:

- **Connecting** consumer champions and civil society with regulators, ombudsmen, government and, where appropriate, industry.
- **Building capacity** - sharing expertise, learning, insight, policy and good practice.
- **Facilitating joint action and influence,** including with research and thought leadership

Our Values

- **Supportive** – A trusted, collaborative space where members share knowledge and challenges openly.
- **Impactful** – A focus on real-world outcomes that influence policy, practice, and consumer experience. To achieve this, we are flexible and responsive in our approach.
- **Value for money and time** – Efficient, high-impact activity that delivers tangible benefits.
- **Innovative** – Fresh thinking that challenges the status quo to improve consumer outcome

Strategic Priorities (2026–2029)

These are member-led priorities which are reviewed regularly, with flexibility to respond to the changing context and policy landscapes.



Affordable & Fair Prices



PSR & Data for Good



Inclusive by Design



Protections Fit for the Future

Supporting Pillars:
Member Capacity Building
ESAN Funding & Membership Growth
Enablers including Lived Experience

1. **Affordability and fair charges**

Millions of consumers struggle to afford essential services. Household debt is high, with rising numbers of people experiencing negative budgets where incomes do not meet basic needs. Support varies significantly across sectors with telecoms generally lagging behind water and energy.

Many ESAN members are campaigning for urgent help, national social tariffs in water and energy, debt write-off, and improvements in the quality and accessibility of advice on a range of areas that impact affordability. There are challenges around who receives support, and with utility companies facing billions in bad debt, there is a need for a frank debate about where the role of the company ends and the state should begin.

We take a consumer-centric view, recognising that changes in support in one sector have knock-on effects on people's ability to afford other essential services. The transition to a net-zero electricity system for example, raises difficult questions about who pays and when with potential winners and losers. Alongside short-term emergency interventions, we need practical long-term solutions to ensure everyone can access essential services.

Key Actions (2026–2029)

- **Support members' work** on affordability, debt, and fair prices by:
  - Sharing research and good practice
  - Convening conversations on shared challenges
  - Facilitating networking and collaboration i.e., consultation responses and campaigns
- Publish and share a review of **social tariffs** across water, energy, and telecoms to identify lessons learned and recommendations and opportunities for joint work.
- Shine a spotlight on the affordability needs of **lesser-heard/higher need groups** e.g., heat network customers; carers; those in digital poverty; terminally ill; those aging without children; time of use energy customers.
- Thought leadership on **longer-term solutions** and **innovation** to support affordability, including minimum water and energy allowances and better use of data to identify at risk groups and target support.

Metrics

- Satisfaction survey - majority of members working on affordability and debt find ESAN useful.
- Improvements in support for customers struggling or at risk of struggling to afford their bills.
- Minimum three thought leadership blogs/discussion papers exploring new ideas for affordability support.

2. **Future of the Priority Services Register (PSR) & Data for Good**

There are challenges around ensuring those that most need support receive it in a timely way today and in the future.

- Awareness of PSR, while improving, continues to be lower than where it needs to be.
- There is increased PSR data sharing between water and energy, but potential to expand to other sectors such as telecoms and financial services.
- There are estimated to be more than 20 'tell-me once platforms' risking undermining their aims. Any solution/s must be independent, transparent and act in consumers' best interests.
- With increasing numbers potentially on the PSR, there are challenges around prioritisation and cost of service delivery. Monitoring frameworks need to focus more on quality of provision, ensuring households receive the services they need in a timely way.
- There are questions about how we can ensure PSR is fit for the future, with calls for new codes and services to meet changing need.
- There are inconsistencies in support between sectors and companies.
- There's increased data matching between local and national governments and companies to help with automatic enrolment on support, but this is not standard practice. There is scope for a standardised approach for better use of existing data.
- Greater access to data can help in identifying, tailoring and targeting support, but data is not equally available across the UK.
- There's a large number of parties, including many of our members doing research and advocacy in this area. There is an opportunity to reduce duplication and coordinate activity.

Key Actions (2026–2029)

- Bring together key parties via a series of roundtables to develop a Shared Vision & ESAN Asks for the PSR, data sharing and related consumer protections.
- Collate and share research and learning via meetings, publications, and an online hub. Help identify gaps in knowledge where further action is needed to move progress on.
- Advocate for greater access to 'data for good' including in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
- Facilitate collaboration: on consultations and calls for evidence and sharing learning e.g., DSIT's work on data matching/Kickstarter projects and the New Data Library.
- Explore the availability of consumer, vulnerability, and complaint data across sectors to help track consumer trends and evidence the need for change.

Metrics

- Satisfaction survey - majority of members working on PSR and Data for Good find ESAN useful.
- Publish ESAN Shared Asks. Shared Asks adopted by 10+ organisations.
- Asks referenced in regulatory and government policy.
- Data delivers better outcomes for consumers.

3. **Inclusive by Design Services**

As the population ages and disability prevalence increases, more consumers will require accessible products and services. Tailored support becomes less sustainable and more expensive, increasing the importance of embedding inclusion at the design stage. Decision makers must reflect diversity of consumer needs in policy and delivery design. Not all customers are able to access services for themselves. Some may require a trusted third party to support them. It is important that advisors get priority access to companies to help advocate on consumers' behalf especially when things go wrong.

Key Actions (2026–2029)

- Identify, share, and promote 'inclusive by design' good practice across sectors and internationally.
- Support members in their work to identify and address barriers to accessing essential services, including barriers faced by advisors by sharing lived experience and promoting constructive solutions.
- Research and share available consumer, vulnerability, and complaint data across sectors to help track consumer trends and evidence the need for change.
- Mystery shopping to better understand how accessible utility companies' phone lines are for customers who want to contact them.

Metrics

- Satisfaction survey - majority of members working on inclusive by Design issues find ESAN useful.
- Key decision-makers' awareness of barriers to access and potential solutions increases.
- Demonstrable accessibility improvements by companies, government, and regulators. E.g., provision by companies of a priority phone line for front line advisors to support them in their work.

4. **Protections Fit for the Future**

In our thought leadership sessions, we will explore and shape how consumer vulnerability protections and tools might evolve to adapt to changing trends including market changes, climate impacts, digitalisation and AI.

Key Actions

- Host thought-leadership roundtables with members, academics, futurists, regulators, and government to shape future protections.
    - Explore the impact of climate change on consumer vulnerability and affordability and the possible changing role of companies, government, and regulators.
    - Explore role of AI in services and market practices and potential to improve outcomes for consumers, plugging gaps in advocacy and support.
    - Publish blogs/discussion papers on risks, opportunities to shape future agendas.

5. Member Capacity Building

A cross-cutting theme supporting all workstreams.

Key Actions (2026–2029)

- Pilot a shorter, timelier, email consumer vulnerability news bulletin.
- Publish new-look monthly newsletter.
- Launch new website and Vulnerability Insights Hub – bringing together key consumer vulnerability research on ESAN's priority themes from UK and overseas in one place.
- Deliver regular teach-ins, workshops, and policy briefings including from other members, government, companies, regulators, and international speakers.
- Annual in person networking event including with industry.
- Collaborate with wider networks and coalitions working on consumer issues.

Metrics

- Member satisfaction - 90% respondents find ESAN useful and say it helps them with their work.

ESAN Funding & Membership Growth

To ensure ESAN's long-term sustainability.

Key Actions

- Secure multi-year funding or sponsorship
- Launch paid corporate affiliate membership.
- Pilot guest memberships
- Develop members offers and forward events plan

Metrics

- Core funding secured for 3 years.
- 100% increase in paid members including 4 regulator members.
- Reserves covering 12 months' operating costs.

Enablers

- **Lived Experience** – Understand essential services through the eyes of consumers and not in sector silos.
- **Collaboration** – Maintain Chatham House confidentiality to support open dialogue and safe spaces for not for profits.
- **Evidence & Influence** – Align outputs with regulatory and government timelines.
- **Visibility** – Strengthen the brand through content, media, and cross-sector.

Annual Review Cycle

Year	Focus	Milestones
2026–27	Build the Foundations	Secure funding; develop strategy & work plan. Launch website; publish strategy; update forward events programme; begin research.
2027–28	Influence & Adoption	Refine workstreams and priorities and focus on delivery.
2028–29	Influence & Review	Impact evaluation; publish 3-year impact report; secure new funding; formal strategy relaunch.