

# Essential Services Access Network

Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24

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# ESAN

The Essential Services  
Access Network

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**ESAN is a Registered Charity number 1157865**

## **Chairman's Introduction**



I am very pleased to be able to introduce the Essential Services Access Network's Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24. ESAN has had another successful year in facilitating a dialogue between the voluntary sector, consumer groups, regulators and ombudsmen, as well as debating important issues in its member meetings. I am very grateful to all those who have taken the time to participate in our meetings and contribute their ideas.

I am delighted to welcome new member Independent Age and look forward to further expansion of the network during the next year.

There is, however, less good news as our membership has shrunk over the last year with a consequential reduction in our income. The details of this are set out in the Treasurer's report below. A short summary is that ESAN's income no longer covers our current expenditure. As trustees, we convened a working group of trustees and members to try and come up with a new strategy, but this was unsuccessful. It is possible to re-organise ESAN but that depends on whether its members would find this worthwhile. In the absence of alternative proposals we, as trustees, feel that there is no alternative but to propose that the ESAN charity is wound-up in 2025. The network may, and we hope will, continue in some form.

I put this proposal forward with considerable sadness, because of ESAN's long history, but it has become clear that members and stakeholders are no longer in a position to provide the resources to support ESAN in its current format. The environment within which ESAN operates has changed significantly over the last two or three years, which has had an impact on our operations. I am happy to discuss ways of changing ESAN but, in the absence of any proposals, we will have to cease operating as a charity.

I am pleased that we have held some of our quarterly meetings outside London in Sutton Coldfield and Bristol. My thanks to Auriga Services, Age UK, Independent Age and the Centre for Sustainable Energy for hosting these meetings.

The policy context for ESAN's members over the last year has been particularly challenging, due to the cost-of-living crisis and the additional pressure this has created for many of the

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clients that member organisations are supporting. Looking forward, although there has been a change in government, there are no signs that this will ease in the short term and so it will remain important to develop policies and practical approaches to help people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

I would like to thank my fellow trustees for their contributions to ESAN this year. I would like to thank ESAN Treasurer Chris Downs for his hard work throughout the year. I would like to thank Dr Tim Dodsworth for his valuable contributions to the Network this year. I would like to thank our outgoing Trustees: Danielle Butler and John Kamoto, for their hard work and contributions over the year and wish them well for the future.

Lastly, I would like to thank our Network Coordinator, Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley, without whom none of this would be possible.

**Prof Cosmo Graham**  
**October 2024**

## About ESAN

The Essential Services Access Network (ESAN) is an independent, membership funded organisation. ESAN is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), registered with the Charity Commission (registered charity number 1157865).

## ESAN Aims and Objectives

ESAN's objective is to promote social inclusion for the public benefit by helping to prevent people who are in vulnerable circumstances from being socially excluded from essential services. It covers four of the sectors essential to modern life: water, energy, communications, and financial services.

ESAN is particularly concerned with issues such as access, affordability and vulnerability. In every case we want the consumer voice to be stronger and more influential. At its heart and as its name implies, ESAN is a unique network bringing together regulators and ombudsmen on the one hand and consumer and voluntary groups on the other.

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Our quarterly meetings and our monthly newsletters facilitate useful connections and relevant information. From time to time, we organise events which extend our work to adjacent sectors such as transport, legal services and health services.

Full membership of ESAN is open to consumer bodies, voluntary organisations and individuals with relevant expertise. ESAN's full members include: Age UK, Auriga Services, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Centre for Sustainable Energy, Christians Against Poverty, Consumer Council for Water, Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Different Petal, Independent Age, Money Advice Trust, National Energy Action, StepChange, Vulnerability Registration Service and Zoe McLeod.

ESAN also offers an affiliate membership (non-voting) to regulators and other supervisory bodies including: Ofwat, Ombudsman Services, and the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland. Newsletter only subscriptions are also available.

## ESAN Trustees

### **Prof Cosmo Graham, Chairman and Trustee (appointed April 2019)**



Cosmo Graham is an emeritus Professor of Law at the Leicester Law School, University of Leicester. He is an expert in law and policy research into the regulation of essential services, with a focus on the representation of consumer interest, consumers in vulnerable circumstances, and dispute resolution. Previous academic roles in law include Liverpool Polytechnic, University of Sheffield, University of Hull (H K Bevan Professor of Law). Prof Graham was a Member of the European Commission Working Group on vulnerable consumers in the energy sector (2011-16), and a Member of the Competition Commission (1999-2008). He is currently the external reviewer for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Independent Customer Service Complaints Reviewer for the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

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## **Chris Downs, Treasurer and Trustee**



Chris Downs took up the position of Trustee and Treasurer in October 2021. Earlier in his career, Chris worked as an economist in two of the UK's largest trade associations, and since then in universities. Chris has been a committed educator, concerned with enabling all to access the benefits of higher study, for some 30 years. He has, in the past, taken a particular interest in financial services and pensions.

## **Dr Tim Dodsworth, Trustee**



Tim Dodsworth was elected as a Trustee in October 2022. Tim is associate professor of contract law at the University of Reading School of Law. His research focuses on the intersection between contractual values and vulnerability. Tim has written on the topic of underlying contractual values, vulnerability in essential services, consumer expectations and fairness standards. The most recent research project is based on identifying resilience obligations through relational contract theory in essential services contracts which could enable sustainable protection of vulnerable individuals through contractual obligations.

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## Dr Danielle Butler, Trustee



Danielle Butler was elected as a Trustee in February 2023. Danielle is a Senior Research and Policy Officer at fuel poverty charity National Energy Action and Trustee and Founder of the Fuel Poverty Research Network. Danielle's work focuses on amplifying the lived experience to better understand, design and deliver effective policy, with a particular interest in energy-related advice and support and how these function as an essential element of wider efforts to tackle fuel poverty. Danielle has worked extensively with a wide range of research funders, partners and other key stakeholders including UK governments, the health sector, statutory, and third sector organisations, both in the UK and beyond.

## John Kamoto, Trustee



John Kamoto was elected as a Trustee in February 2023. John is Age UK's Policy and Research Officer, working on the charity's Consumer and Financial Services policy. John has accumulated various skill sets through years of experience in various third-sector organisations and government bodies that align with his goal of promoting the interests of vulnerable people. He recently participated in the John Smith's Centre's inaugural [Emerging Leaders Programme](#), which provided him with a placement as a Researcher at the [Scottish Parliament Information Centre \(SPiCe\)](#) within the Financial Scrutiny Unit to expand further his knowledge of research and the parliamentary process. He is particularly interested in collaborating to develop optimal solutions to fix complex problems or lessen their effects on individuals and communities. John is also a keen photographer and enjoys doing this in his spare time.

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## ESAN Network Coordinator



Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley writes the monthly members' newsletter and manages the members quarterly meetings and special events as well as the ESAN website. Vanessa has a background in higher education, governance and policy development. Her policy experience spans sustainable development, climate change, flood risk management and transport. She has worked with local authorities, national agencies and government to develop and promote innovative policy and practice and shape legislation.

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## Review of the Year

Over the course of the year covered by this report (April 2023 to March 2024), ESAN held four separate meetings for our members. Our meetings are mainly now hybrid events, hosted by members around the country. We have covered a wide range of topics and have had some excellent presentations and roundtable discussions. These took place within the context of the cost of living crisis, the winter energy price rises and political change. The meetings were popular and well attended.

The members' newsletter continues to be a success, both with our members and newsletter subscribers. Our editor, Vanessa Goodchild-Bradley, keeps us up to date with sectoral developments in the provision of essential services to vulnerable consumers as well as within the wider political context. Members contribute updates on their work, publications, news and events.

Our Chairman, Cosmo Graham, had another busy year promoting ESAN and our members. ESAN continues to use its' newsletters, meetings, and website to keep members informed of developments in this important area.

### Members meetings

#### **24 April 2023, hosted by Auriga Services and online**

The meeting included presentations from David Woakes, Amy Smith and Mark Smith, Auriga Services, on *The Priority Services Register and Essential Data Sharing Programme and Network*. There was also a presentation from Lauren Long, Financial Ombudsman Service, on *The cost of living and consumer vulnerability* and from Paul Walmsley, Christians Against Poverty, on *CAP's Cost of living polling data*. Members also took part in a discussion on *Organisations working together to support those affected by the cost-of-living crisis*.

#### **3 July 2023, hosted by Centre for Sustainable Energy**

The meeting included presentations from Ian Preston and Katey Bell, CSE, on *Changes to energy advice services in the last 2.5 years* and from Karen Smith, CSE, on the *Bristol Fuel Poverty Action Plan – challenges of networking support across a city*.

David Southgate and John Kamoto from Age UK gave a presentation on *Keeping the lights on: the case for an Energy Social Tariff* and Professor Graham facilitated a roundtable



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discussion on *Sustainable long-term advice - how to effectively resource advice services*. Members discussed the increasing demands and workload experienced by advice agencies, due to the rising level of debt, more complicated cases and a lack of new funding to address this demand.

### **25 October 2023, hosted by Age UK**

The Annual General Meeting approved the 2022-23 Annual Report and Accounts, the re-election of Professor Graham and Chris Downs as Trustees, the re-election of Professor Graham as ESAN Chair and Chris Downs as Treasurer.

The members' part of the meeting included a presentation from Matt Copeland, NEA, on *NEA priorities and issues with regards to the energy crisis, prices, markets and debt*, as well as a presentation from Sally West, Age UK, about the charity's work on *Digital Exclusion* and an update from David Southgate, Age UK, on *Social tariff work*.

### **21 February 2024, hosted by Independent Age**

For the first meeting of 2024, members took part in a roundtable discussion on their *Priorities for 2024: key issues, upcoming campaigns, projects, research and publications*. With a general election on the horizon, the meeting included a discussion with members sharing the *Top 3 issues/policies that they would like to see in party manifestoes*. Some members reported that they were already working with political parties to highlight their key issues.

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## Governance

ESAN has in place a comprehensive but proportionate system of management and controls, which is kept under regular review.

At the Annual General Meeting on 25 October 2023, members unanimously agreed the continuing appointment of the following network officers for a further year:

- Prof Cosmo Graham, Chairman
- Chris Downs, Treasurer and Trustee

ESAN also has the following Trustees:

- Dr Tim Dodsworth
- Dr Danielle Butler
- John Kamoto

The Trustees met 4 times over the course of the year covered by this report (June 2023, October 2023, February 2024 and April 2024) to review governance matters, plan future meetings and consider the future viability of the network. Issues discussed included setting the 2024-25 annual budget; a proposal to increase membership subscription rates; how to ensure the future financial sustainability of the network; agreement to conduct a member survey and options for future models to ensure ESAN remains relevant and viable into the future.

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## Financial Summary

### Summary of accounts

ESAN's activities are funded by membership subscriptions. Subscription fees remained unchanged in 2023-24.

An income and expenditure account for 2023-24, and a statement of ESAN's financial position at 5<sup>th</sup> April 2024 are provided below.

Income in the year was £11,952.92, which was more than 18% lower than the previous year (and more than 30% lower than 2021-22). Expenditure was 5.5% higher than in 2022-23, at £16,298.11 so that a much larger deficit of £4,345.19 was recorded in the income and expenditure account.

It is disappointing that the downward trend in subscriptions income noted last year has continued so strongly. The deficit recorded in 2023-24 is equivalent to more than a quarter of ESAN's expenditure and it must be acknowledged that ESAN's position is currently financially unsustainable. The increase in subscription rates for 2024-25 that was agreed at the 2023 AGM will be insufficient to address this situation. Despite the efforts of trustees and members during the past year, a way to restore ESAN to financial sustainability has not been identified for discussion at the 2024 AGM, and members should anticipate that decisions will be required before the next AGM.

<b>Income &amp; Expenditure account</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2022-23</b>
Subscriptions	£11,952.92	£14,657.92
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<u>£11,952.92</u>	<u>£14,657.92</u>
Fees to ESAN administrator	£15,538.98	£15,227.83
Meeting & event costs	£170.93	£0.00
Website & email costs	£352.25	£123.00
Office costs	£0.00	£100.72
Trustee expenses	£235.95	£0.00
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<u>£16,298.11</u>	<u>£15,451.55</u>
<b>SURPLUS (DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR</b>	<u><u>(£4,345.19)</u></u>	<u><u>(£793.63)</u></u>

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### Statement of financial position at 5th April 2024

#### Assets

Bank current account (Co-operative) at 5 April '24	£20,612.42
Fixed assets	£0.00

£20,612.42

#### Accumulated fund

Brought forward	£24,957.61	
Deficit for the year	£4,345.19	<u>£20,612.42</u>

#### Liabilities

Accounts payable	£0.00	
		<u>£0.00</u>

#### TOTAL NET ASSETS

£20,612.42