



NETWORKS

Stakeholder Engagement Strategy & Plan 2026 Consultation Response Paper

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Consultation Responses	4
2.1 Overview of Consultation Feedback	4
2.2 Strengthening Engagement, Collaboration and Delivery	5
2.3 Transparency, Data and Predictability Enable Better Outcomes	6
2.4 Supporting Flexibility, Whole-System Integration and Efficient Use of Network Assets	7
2.5 Putting Customers at the Centre of the Energy Transition	8
2.6 Demonstrating Impact, Accountability and Value for Money	9
2.7 Collaboration on Resilience, Infrastructure and Emergency Response	10
2.8 Expanding Engagement, Training and Capacity Building	11
3. Conclusion	12

1. Introduction

This response paper is intended to be read in conjunction with [ESB Networks' Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Plan 2026](#) which was open for public consultation from 19 December 2025 to 31 January 2026.

This paper summarises responses received and provides commentary where appropriate.

ESB Networks would like to thank all stakeholders who contributed to the consultation on our Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Plan 2026. The feedback received reflects a shared commitment to a secure, sustainable and customer centred electricity network. We value the time and insight offered by industry partners, local authorities, customers, community organisations and representative bodies.



2. Consultation Responses

The 2026 consultation received eight responses, compared to one response in 2025. These were received from a broad range of stakeholders including:

- Local Authorities
- Chambers of Commerce
- Industry representative bodies
- Energy suppliers / Market participants
- Renewable developers

2.1 Overview of Consultation Feedback

Overall, stakeholders were supportive of the 2026 Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Plan, noting improvements in clarity, structure, and alignment with PR6, Networks for Net Zero, and wider national policy objectives.

Stakeholders recognised that the strategy provides a structured and transparent framework for engagement during a period of significant network investment and system transformation.

Notwithstanding this positive feedback, stakeholders emphasised that:

- engagement must demonstrate measurable impact and outcomes.
- identified issues should translate into practical delivery improvements.

One respondent highlighted that recommendations previously made by the Networks Stakeholder Engagement Evaluation Panel (NSEEP) in August 2025 [Electricity Networks Stakeholder Engagement Evaluation \(NSEE\) Panel Close-out Report 2024 | CRU.ie](#) had not been fully addressed in the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Plan. These recommendations were addressed in the [Stakeholder Engagement Report 2025](#) and are reflected in our ongoing operations where applicable.

Stakeholders also expressed interest in the evolution of the engagement approach over longer time horizons, including how engagement will support delivery of 2030 and 2040 objectives in a more phased and forward-looking manner.

The key response themes, along with ESB Networks' response, are set out below.

2.2 Strengthening Engagement, Collaboration and Delivery

Stakeholder feedback:

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of structured, consistent engagement across national, regional and local levels. There was a strong focus on:

- early and ongoing coordination with stakeholders
- the importance of structured engagement with Local Authorities, recognising the critical role of planning alignment in enabling timely infrastructure delivery.
- alignment between utilities, planning authorities and developers.
- the role of engagement in supporting infrastructure delivery and economic growth.

Stakeholders also highlighted the need to use engagement mechanisms to identify delivery risks at an early stage, including planning constraints, sequencing challenges, and local barriers, particularly in the context of PR6.

ESB Networks response:

ESB Networks will continue to prioritise engagement at a national, regional and local level, including with Local Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, and industry stakeholders. We will continue to strengthen coordination mechanisms to support early visibility of infrastructure requirements, capacity constraints, and delivery priorities.

In line with stakeholder feedback, we will use engagement channels to identify and address delivery risks at an earlier stage, including addressing practical delivery challenges such as administrative processes and information access, and to support more coordinated, cross-sector solutions.



2.3 Transparency, Data and Predictability Enable Better Outcomes

Stakeholder feedback:

Stakeholders welcomed increased transparency measures, including:

- capacity heatmaps and annual capacity workbooks.
- connection reporting and data dashboards.
- clearer engagement schedules and metrics.

These were seen as critical to enabling planning, investment, and coordination.

However, stakeholders highlighted a continued need for:

- improved clarity on connection timelines and delivery assumptions.
- greater predictability and reliability of information.
- clearer visibility of organisational ownership and engagement pathways, to support more effective navigation of ESB Networks structures and points of contact.

ESB Networks response:

ESB Networks will continue to enhance transparency through regular publication of network data, including capacity heatmaps, capacity workbooks, connection reporting updates, and updated developer information, including hosting annual regional developer education events.

We recognise the importance of predictable and reliable information in supporting stakeholder planning and have invested significantly over the past year to enhance transparency in this area. In 2025, we introduced a nationwide Single Point of Contact process for business customers seeking connections under 100 kVA. For customers with more complex demand requirements, particularly those seeking connections above 100 kVA, it can be more challenging to provide firm, standardised timelines, as these connections are influenced by a wide range of factors. To strengthen support for this customer group, we created a new multi-site customer relationship partner in Q3 2025, dedicated solely to supporting customers seeking connections between 100 kVA and 399 kVA. This support includes regular direct engagement with customers, as well as hosting regional Developer Days to provide greater clarity on all aspects of the connection process.

In Q4 2025, ESB Networks added a leadership organisation chart and leadership roles and areas of responsibilities to the website to provide clearer guidance to stakeholders on areas of accountability. [ESB Networks leadership team](#) | [ESB Networks](#)



2.4 Supporting Flexibility, Whole-System Integration and Efficient Use of Network Assets

Stakeholder feedback:

Responses emphasised the importance of developing practical flexibility solutions, addressing demand-side flexibility, including local solutions, and storage, exploring innovations such as Maximum Export Capacity (MEC) sharing, and ensuring strong coordination with EirGrid as the system evolves.

Stakeholders strongly supported the focus on system flexibility, including:

- demand-side participation.
- storage and local solutions.
- customer participation in electricity markets.

Flexibility was widely recognised as a cost-effective alternative to traditional network reinforcement and a key enabler of renewable integration.

ESB Networks response:

ESB Networks will continue to advance its flexibility work programme in collaboration with industry, the CRU, and EirGrid. This includes continued engagement through established forums such as the Distribution Markets and System Operation (DMSO)'s Flexibility Advisory Council, the CRU's National Energy Demand Strategy (NEDS), and various other industry governance forums .

ESB Networks is progressing the Domestic EV Flex pilot under which is a key action under the NEDS, focused on enabling demand-side flexibility through smart EV charging. The pilot will explore whether smart charging can encourage EV drivers to adopt more flexibility-friendly behaviours, shift demand away from peak periods, and inform the development of a future flexibility product.

In parallel, ESB Networks launched a “Local Business Flex” product proposal consultation in April 2026 to seek industry feedback on proposed medium-term flexibility products. These products are designed to enable and incentivise demand flexibility to help manage local network congestion in selected areas across the Republic of Ireland. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, procurement is expected to open for qualification in H2 2026.

ESB Networks also recently completed the procurement process for its Demand Flexibility Product which is new initiative that aims to utilise medium-duration flexibility services to help manage congestion on the electricity network and is a key action under the NEDS and the DCEE's Electricity Storage Policy Framework.

Our Joint System Operator Programme with our counterparts in EirGrid will build on the successes achieved during Price Review Five and will be carried forward into the Price Review Six period with significant progress made already in 2026, for example with the publication of a joint implementation roadmap to give effect to CRU's decision on the sharing of MEC behind a single connection point and the hosting of a webinar with our external stakeholders on same.

Stakeholder feedback on innovative approaches, including enhanced connection models and mechanisms to optimise network utilisation, will be considered within the relevant regulatory and operational frameworks as part of ongoing whole-system planning.

2.5 Putting Customers at the Centre of the Energy Transition

Stakeholder feedback:

Stakeholders welcomed the focus on empowered customers, but emphasised that:

- technology adoption (e.g. smart meters) should translate into behavioural change.
- and that metrics should demonstrate meaningful engagement outcomes, including customer understanding, participation, and behavioural change, rather than solely signup metrics.

Stakeholders also highlighted the need for tailored engagement approaches for different customer groups, including SMEs and Large Energy Users, and the importance of clear and proactive communication.

ESB Networks response:

ESB Networks successfully achieved the milestone of over two million smart meter installations in 2025. During the smart meter rollout phase, customer sign-up and participation rates were meaningful measures of engagement effectiveness against this strategic objective.

During PR6, investments in smart metering and data will build on the smart meter rollout, the Smart Metering Operations Centre (SMOC), and the Data Access Office to maximise smart meter capabilities and support future data use cases, in line with the Smart Meter Data Access Code, which is expected to be implemented in Q2 2027.

ESB Networks' Smart+ and meter transformation investments will ensure customers can benefit from up-to-date smart meter technology and access advanced insights about their energy use, helping them make more informed decisions.

ESB Networks adapts its engagement approaches to meet the specific needs and behaviours of different customer segments, ensuring communications and engagement activities are tailored to the audiences we seek to reach. We will also continue to improve how customer engagement is measured, ensuring metrics reflect meaningful outcomes, including awareness, understanding and active participation in the energy transition.



2.6 Demonstrating Impact, Accountability and Value for Money

Stakeholder feedback:

Stakeholders emphasised the need to strengthen how engagement impact is measured and demonstrated.

Key areas identified include:

- development of engagement effectiveness metrics – ensuring that customer metrics demonstrate meaningful engagement outcomes, not solely activity-based indicators.
- introduction of sentiment or trust indicators.
- evidence demonstrating how engagement informs decisions (e.g. case studies).
- improved visibility of the value delivered through engagement.

ESB Networks response:

ESB Networks acknowledges the importance of demonstrating the impact and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement.

Work is underway during 2026 to strengthen our approach to engagement measurement, including the development of enhanced metrics, sentiment tracking, and clearer feedback loops. This will include strengthening how we demonstrate the link between stakeholder feedback, decision-making, and delivery outcomes, in line with stakeholder expectations.

We will continue to report on the outcomes of stakeholder engagement through case studies that clearly demonstrate how stakeholder perspectives have been considered in decision-making and how engagement has influenced business decisions, programme development, and service improvements, consistent with the approach taken in the [2025 Stakeholder Engagement Report](#).



2.7 Collaboration on Resilience, Infrastructure and Emergency Response

Stakeholder feedback:

Given the increasing frequency of severe weather events, responses highlighted the importance of strengthened engagement on resilience, outage coordination and emerging risks, including:

- coordination with Local Authorities, suppliers, and critical infrastructure operators.
- integration of learnings from severe weather events.
- improved outage communication and coordination.
- the importance of resilient infrastructure in supporting energy security, economic competitiveness, and climate objectives was also emphasised.

ESB Networks response:

ESB Networks recognises that effective storm response depends on strong relationships, trusted information flows and coordinated action across a broad stakeholder ecosystem. The learnings from Storm Éowyn have reinforced the importance of engagement before, during and after severe weather events, and have informed our continued approach to stakeholder planning, storm preparedness and network resilience. Since Storm Éowyn, ESB Networks has published three key documents which set out the learnings, actions and forward plans arising from the event and wider severe weather experience: the Storm Éowyn Review Report, the Winter 2025 Grid Resilience Plan, and the Review of Distribution Overhead Line Standards for Extreme Wind Events. Together, these documents demonstrate ESB Networks' commitment to strengthening network resilience, enhancing storm preparedness, improving outage coordination / communications, and ensuring that learnings are translated into practical actions for customers, stakeholders and the wider electricity system.

Following Storm Éowyn, ESB Networks has progressed a structured programme of recommendations relating to storm preparedness, asset performance, resource mobilisation, customer communications, and safety. These recommendations are being delivered and tracked through established governance arrangements and are focused on improving storm preparedness, restoration effectiveness, customer support and stakeholder coordination. Key areas of focus include refining storm plans and procedures, strengthening digital and data capability through the planned Storm Response Toolkit, improving Estimated Restoration Time processes, enhancing vulnerable customer supports, maintaining contact centre readiness and strengthening coordination through the National Emergency Coordination Group and related subgroups.

The Storm Resilience and Readiness team has been established to support a more coordinated and proactive approach to severe weather preparedness and restoration improvement. A core priority for the team is sustained engagement with key internal and external stakeholders, including Local Authorities, Government Departments, critical infrastructure customers, telecoms and utility partners, emergency response organisations, forestry / land stakeholders, and senior internal operational teams. This engagement is designed to ensure that storm learnings are translated into practical improvements, shared understanding and clearer response arrangements.

2.8 Expanding Engagement, Training and Capacity Building

Stakeholder feedback:

Stakeholders highlighted the value of:

- structured engagement forums and working groups.
- bilateral engagement.
- refresher training and topic-specific workshops to support understanding of retail market processes and evolving system requirements.

ESB Networks response:

ESB Networks welcomes stakeholders' suggestions to further support knowledge-sharing, training and capacity building through structured engagement forums, bilateral engagement, and topic-specific workshops.

ESB Networks will continue to prioritise engagement with stakeholders through a wide range of structured, transparent and inclusive channels, including stakeholder forums, bilateral meetings, consultations, topic-specific workshops and dedicated engagement programmes across the business. This includes engagement with generators, renewable developers, storage providers, customers, academic institutions, industry participants and other stakeholders through our connections and developer engagement channels, as well as through work programmes focused on smart metering, flexibility and the DMSO transition. These activities are designed to provide clear and timely information, support stakeholder understanding of evolving system requirements, connection processes and flexibility developments, and ensure stakeholders have fair and meaningful opportunities to participate in, and inform, the transition to a more flexible, customer-centred electricity system.

ESB Networks notes the request for refresher training for retail market participants. Retail market participant support is delivered through Retail Market Design Service (RMDS), a ring-fenced function within ESB Networks responsible for retail electricity market design on behalf of the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). RMDS provides market entry and onboarding support, release-based engagement, and process support through ongoing market messaging guidance. The Industry Governance Group (IGG) was established to implement and oversee issues relating to retail market governance and provides a structured forum through which participants can have a voice in decisions affecting market participants and customers.



3. Conclusion

The feedback received through this consultation reinforces the shared ambition of stakeholders across Ireland's energy system: to deliver a secure, resilient and decarbonised electricity network that meets the needs of all customers.

While stakeholders welcome the ambition and improved structure of the 2026 Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Plan, they are clear that engagement must now translate into delivery outcomes, reduce risk, and unlock solutions at pace.

Stakeholders have clearly emphasised the importance of ensuring that engagement continues to evolve in line with the scale and pace of system change, and that it remains focused on enabling delivery, reducing risk, and supporting coordinated action across the sector.

ESB Networks is committed to ensuring that our engagement remains transparent, inclusive and aligned with stakeholder expectations. The insights shared through this process will help shape our engagement activities and will continue to inform our long-term approach as we work together to deliver Ireland's clean energy future.

We welcome ongoing feedback on stakeholder engagement. If you have any comments or require further information on this response, please contact us at stakeholder@esbnetworks.ie





NETWORKS

ESB Networks
Leopardstown Road,
Fockrock,
Dublin 18,
D18XN80

Tel 1800 372 757 or +353 21 2386555
Email esbnetworks@esb.ie

esbnetworks.ie