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The monthly summary of consultation matters by Consultation Guru –

Rhion Jones

Consultation Catch-up



Somewhere at the back of this attendee shoutout, I was at [Community Energy England](#)'s first Regional Forum at Newhaven, Sussex in March. My role was to help explain the importance of stakeholder engagement and mapping to enthusiastic volunteers and facilitators who are spearheading the bottom-up drive towards Net-Zero. This matters because relying on Governments and bureaucracies alone may not work, and local communities need to build alliances and manage networks to have the necessary impacts. I'll go anywhere – within reason – to spread this word and wave the flag for public engagement and consultation!

Best of the Blogs

[Satisfaction with NHS & Social Care: Focus on service users.](#) (Blog 64)



This is an important piece of public & patient opinion polling, and is therefore also of great interest from a consultation viewpoint. The headlines are clearly bad news for the Government but I have focused on the data showing the difference between what actual users of a service think and the rest of the sample – who may have formed their views from secondary sources or the news media. Lots of learning, and I have teased out five important lessons for those who organise public engagement and consultation.

['Hostile Takeover' of Police & Crime Commissioner's role was unlawful](#)



[due to a flawed consultation](#) (Blog 63)

There are interesting aspects to Mr Justice Swift's judgment on the 'Hostile Takeover' case in the West Midlands. They include the failure to provide the right information for a lawful consultation – and the finding that there was NOT pre-determination in this case. Neither was there a failure of 'conscientious consideration' despite the Home Office breaking records to publish the output/outcome report within six days of the consultation closure. Quashing the proposed merger means the 2 May election for the Commissioner goes ahead, amid further political embarrassment for the Conservative Mayor. UPDATE. The Home Office brought an Appeal but still lost its case.

[You WILL increase your productivity ... or else!. The case for consulting](#)



[the staff](#) (Blog 62)

The 'Hunt' for productivity improvements makes the Chancellor look for IT projects. In this Blog, I argue that top-down initiatives seldom work. The key lies in bottom-up consultation and engagement with those who actually DO the jobs and I recall the last grandiose NHS fix-everything-at-once IT project, and academics' view of why it failed!

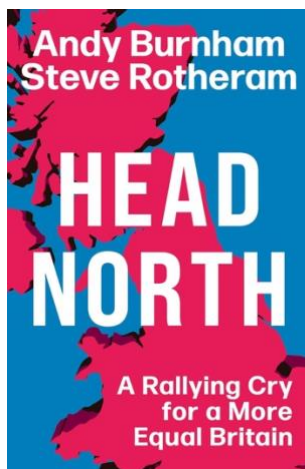
On Page 2, there is a commentary on the Football Governance Bill, comments on Michael Gove's definition of 'extremism' and an important Book Review

Instant insights

- For those who expect the [Football Governance Bill](#) to herald a new era in the willingness of clubs to respond to the wishes of their supporters, I suspect our Parliamentarians have work to do. Reading the Bill, and its [Explanatory Notes](#) one is struck by the use of the terminology. Usually, consultation is regarded as the more demanding process, with legally enforceable rules, whereas engagement is far less precisely defined and almost impossible to enforce. It's therefore a surprise (a pleasant one, admittedly) to see that the Bill, as currently drafted, requires all licensed football clubs in the Top five tiers of the game to 'consult'. Except that this seems to amount to meeting with a representative group from time to time and having '[due regard](#)' to what they say. For those who pass a further 'threshold', more is required – namely 'fan engagement' – a far less precise concept which will need some discussion. Both are welcome but the confusion will lead to some unfulfilled expectations. The proposed **Independent Football Regulator** may well therefore have to juggle with the statute it inherits – unless some sensible amendments are agreed before the General Election blows the whistle on the one piece of law-making that probably has popular support.
- I've always thought Michael Gove was one of the most consultation-savvy of Cabinet Ministers, but his instincts seem to have deserted him in the case of his [new definition of 'extremism'](#). Critics have denounced it for an unprecedented shift in state sanctions from being focused on what one [does](#) to what one [believes](#). It will not be law – just a Government practice to label some organisations as being unfit to have formal relations with Ministerial departments and to receive public funds. There was no consultation either on whether such categorisation is helpful or how the definition was framed and some of the groups Gove cited in Parliament challenge him to repeat his allegations about them outside the protection of Parliamentary privilege. This was in no-one's manifesto – and raises again the question of whether significant policy changes should proceed without any kind of consultation.

The Reading List

The two Labour Mayors of Liverpool and Manchester have joined forces to write this semi-autobiographical account of their journey from the Westminster Parliament to be Community leaders and advocates for a radical reform of UK politics. For a book that starts with powerful personal accounts of the day of the Hillsborough tragedy, it's difficult to maintain momentum. But by focusing on decades of perceived economic, social and political injustice they make the case for ending the London/South-east bias they feel



dominates our public administration. If Boris Johnson never managed to explain 'levelling up' the job has now been done by his opponents. No wonder Keir Starmer is starting to use the same language. Their ten-point plan is a re-tread of many ideas that have been better articulated elsewhere, and include proportional representation, parity for technical education a net-zero reindustrialisation of the north. Less convincing are their plans to end Parliamentary whipping (good luck with that one!) and an over-optimistic view of what a 'Basic Law' might achieve. If there is a Labour Government soon, this may be a useful reference source. Most of all, however, it's worth reading how the experience of Hillsborough and the never-ending battle against the establishment affected and motivated the authors. It runs like a golden thread throughout the book and makes its analysis all the more persuasive.

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