

March 2026

The monthly summary of
consultation matters by
Consultation GuRU –

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Consultation Catch-up



Anyone who doubts the important role public consultations play in shaping public policy needs only to look at the important exercises currently being undertaken. The devolved administrations are all heavily committed with key issues and in England there will be genuine controversy over a consultation on detailed plans to reform SEND. The children & social media exercise or “Do we follow the Aussies?” applies UK-wide and is probably the better consultation. (See page 2) But the political stakes are high in all these prominent consultations; any problems with the process will cause Ministers much grief !

Best of the Blogs

Five consultation Takeaways from NSIP Forum 2026



(Blog 122) Accelerating the renewal of the creaking UK infrastructure was the underlying theme of this year’s NSIP Forum. Consultation was thus on everyone’s lips. Some big issues, and serious worries that we are still tinkering with consultation rather than facing up to the radical re-think I’m now advocating. We need lots more Infrastructure planners, and when they come on board, I suggest they start with my five takeaways from NSIP 2026

Consultation Governance – the three fundamentals



Consultation Governance – the fundamentals!

(Blog 121) Many who work in public engagement /consultation probably view the term ‘governance’ with a mixture of horror, despair or boredom. After all, why burden ourselves with an extra layer of bureaucracy when politicians are on the warpath culling everything in sight unless it builds houses? Many governance models are, in fact, over-complex and what’s needed is simple adherence to three fundamentals. Be the holder of accountability, the custodian of the mandate and the guarantor of standards. That’s all!

Delayed launch of a consultation – a blessing in disguise?



(Blog 120) Like trains, consultations can sometimes arrive later than expected. The current case is about restrictions on the use of social media by children and young people. The BBC thought the consultation started on 19 January; in the event we had to wait till 2 March. I’m not complaining, because there is often a good argument for delay. This Blog considered the value of a pre-announcement and considers some of the factors in play as Ministers geared up for what will be a very high profile and contentious consultation. (See overleaf)

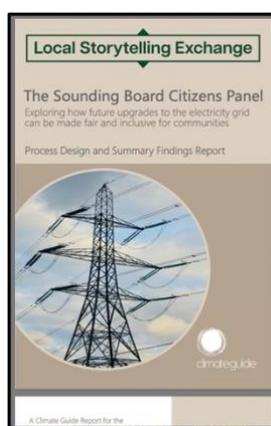
On Page 2 this month, my verdict on two of the Government’s most high-profile consultations - on social media for kids and on SEND services. There’s a Scottish court case to Mull over and some thoughts about football. Best of all, a Citizens Panel that tells us more than most!

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Instant insights

- Liz Kendall's consultation on "[Growing up in the online world](#)" is rather good. Despite suggesting that the Government is committed to take firm action -possibly as soon as this summer, even a cursory look at the 60-page (very readable) consultation paper shows that it is really a '[call for evidence](#)'. Basically, this is a mass research exercise to discover what parents (and the rest of us) think of issues like age restrictions on certain functionalities, the use of Chatbots, enforceability issues and exemptions based on medical or social needs. There are immense implications for human rights as well as the way we live, and this consultation does not go anywhere close to providing a set of proposals. This is a '*discovering people's priorities and preferences*' exercise and will produce an overwhelming amount of data and probably limited consensus. It's open till 26May. Then it becomes a political dogfight
- In contrast, the Government's consultation on reforming [Special Educational Needs & Disability](#) or **SEND** is a far more weighty affair and you probably need a PhD in organisational complexity to read its 120-odd pages. Although it asks 40 reasonable-sounding questions, this really is a policy paper – detailing what it is that Ministers propose in order to fix an undoubtedly unsatisfactory service. These have, apparently been '*co-created*' and in a section called "*You said ...we did*", it is mostly a case of "*You suggested ... We will*". Indeed, this consultation uses the formula "**we will**" 299 times and it is virtually impossible to discern what they have already decided upon from matters where they are open to influence. There needs to be a simpler consultation – for hundreds of thousands of anxious parents to have a better understanding of how their current rights to **SEND** will change. In the meantime, a [letter before claim](#) has already been submitted to challenge the exercise on the basis of *Gunning Two*. Expect much controversy and allegations that the consultation offers few options to anyone – except Ministers!
- We have yet another case where careless use of the word 'consultation' causes problems for a Council. But in a recent case at the Scottish Court of Sessions, Lord Cubie refused a judicial review of **Argyll & Bute Council's** decision to re-build a single school site for the residents of the Isle of Mull at Tobermory. The judgment in the petition of [Mull Campus Working Group Ltd](#) (a company set up solely for the purposes of pursuing a JR!) illustrates why communities find it so difficult to figure out if they are being fairly consulted. Because of the complexities of the funding stream offered by Government, a split-site option was not realistically available – even though many on the island favoured it. Many residents felt they had not been consulted, and, in truth they had not. Unfortunately for them, the Judge decided that no common law obligation to consult had arisen. Engagement was enough. Hmm...
- Two football stories in the news in recent weeks prompts the thought that **fan engagement** and **fan consultation** rights will soon be a reality. One was the political angst caused by Birmingham City's ban on [Maccabi Tel Aviv's supporters](#). The other is the continuing row about the proposed sale of the [FC Halifax Town' Shay Stadium](#). Local communities are no doubt affected by both situations but only the Halifax dispute would fall within the new laws' orbit.

The Reading List



Using my book review space this month to highlight a great piece of work by the Local Storytelling Exchange and funded by the European Climate Foundation. Rachel Coxcoon's report details a set of mini-publics called [The Sounding Board Citizens Panel](#) which tackled "*how future upgrades to the electricity grid can be made fair and inclusive for communities.*" Hard to be more topical! I regard it as a first-class exemplar of an **EXPLORATORY** consultation (*per my [FOUR FUNCTIONS FRAMEWORK](#)*) for it identifies several distinct and very different groupings – people with shared values and perceptions. Some share '*distrust of developers*'; others are '*property pragmatists*'. There are others who coalesce around '*pressing reasons to act*'. And finally, were those who believe in '*power to the people*'. There is no attempt to manufacture a negotiated *consensus*. Just enabling a better understanding of who thinks what and why. I like this study because it uses the '**Q-sort**' methodology that helps participants make difficult trade-offs. In challenging, contentious areas like infrastructure, good quality work of this kind is invaluable, and I recommend it strongly. [See all GuRU book reviews here](#)

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