

May 2026

The monthly summary of
consultation matters by
Consultation GuRU –

Rhion Jones

Consultation Catch-up



As victors and vanquished are interviewed after Thursday's elections in Wales, Scotland and English Councils, listen to the answers to the question "*What will you do differently?*" Then ask yourself, how many of these will result in public consultations? Probably more than new administrations anticipate. Some by statutory requirement and some by '*legitimate expectation*', but others will be because changes to many established expenditure programmes need to carry public support. Politicians should be wary of implementing drastic change without engaging with those affected, and will do well to find better, more agile ways of doing so.

["You said! We did!" Is it always the right consultation outcome?](#) (Blog 127)



"YOU SAID! WE DID!" is a familiar slogan and is a great way to show you've held a meaningful consultation. But it can also obscure some dark secrets and camouflage some inconvenient truths. Please note the AI image is meant to be a joke, for I just want to point out that not everything that some *consultees* urge upon us should automatically be adopted!

Remember Boaty McBoatface! They said ... and They Did!

[After the May Elections; will Council consultations remain 'business as usual'?](#) (Blog 126)



It's been a time when local government officers and service providers have had to think long and hard about life after the May elections. Big changes have been predicted and many well-established policies/processes may have to be re-considered! The way Councils engage and consult is definitely overdue for a re-think, so this Blog provides a blueprint for what can be done better. I'd love to see forward-thinking comms & engagement teams show

how they can adopt MORE AGILE, QUICKER and CHEAPER ways to consult by focusing strongly on the Function a consultation needs to perform rather than sticking to the traditional process. This Blog illustrates a range of scenarios following the [FOUR FUNCTIONS FRAMEWORK!](#)

[If you REALLY want to tackle 'consultation culture' in Government, THIS is how you do it.](#) (Blog 125)



If Ministers are serious about addressing the '*consultation culture*', there is quite a lot they can do. The machinery of Government is complicated and there are perceived bottlenecks. Keir Starmer and his team need to unblock. But their recent Press Release offered only modest tinkering at the edges. **HERE** is what else they should do. A three-point plan that could be done in twelve months or less.

As part of exploring the **IMPLEMENTATION** function re consultation, I've also written an article for my friends in [Publiq](#) It's called [Community Dialogue – the key to building infrastructure?](#) where I make the case for dedicated investment in their kind of tools and technology to improve liaison with local people when we get to the 'shovels in the ground' phase.

[On Page 2](#) this month, more Court cases on consultation, a definitive Report on Democratic capabilities, reflections on stakeholder management systems and review of Tom McTague's remarkable history of euroscepticism.

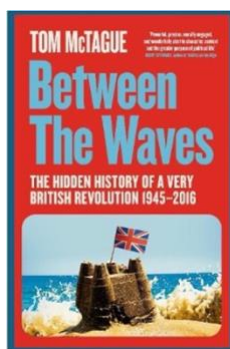
Best of the Blogs

Instant insights

- A consultation on closing children’s centres in the [LB of Ealing](#) has led to a High Court judgment that will be important to many Councils. For one thing the 2006 Childcare Act is pretty specific about the kind of consultation required before children’s centres can be closed. Also, it is yet another case where campaigners argue that service changes were prompted primarily by expenditure cuts and that consultation documentation was not candid enough about this. The Council won on both counts but not before Judge Kimblin raised the interesting issue of whether you can judge the consultation according to the nature of the responses it receives. Expect a Blog analysis soon.
- In contrast, care homes have won a declaration that a decision by [Swansea City Council](#) to approve fee increases without taking account of increased National Insurance contributions was unlawful. The relevant Code of Practice in Wales required Councils to have an ‘understanding’ of care home costs and to collaborate with them. The commercial agreement with the care homes also prescribed the ‘*normal consultation process*’, raising the question of whether such a requirement can be subject to judicial review. The Judge said that it was, but that, on the facts, Swansea had done enough. It should make other Councils wary, though.
- For those interested in the underlying intellectual rationale for many of today’s growing range of participative methodologies, the **INSPIRE** consortium (17 universities and researchers from 11 countries) has just published a comprehensive Report on what is called the [The Democratic Capabilities framework](#). Oliver Escobar and his colleagues explore the real freedoms and opportunities that empower people in marginalised communities, and is well worth study. Whereas the [FOUR FUNCTIONS FRAMEWORK](#) I advocate is slanted toward the practicalities of consultation, the more theoretical INSPIRE analysis is a great reminder of fundamental drivers. In its own words – “*Because democratic capabilities are unevenly distributed – with structural barriers amplifying some voices while constraining others – fostering intersectionally inclusive participation requires actively expanding access to the resources, skills and protections that sustain democratic agency.*” Spot-on!
- The link between high-quality stakeholder management and better consultation is getting clearer; [the critical success factor for large organisations seems to be the adoption of smarter systems](#). But too many in the UK are relying on a patchwork of unrelated standalone applications, and Paul Rivers – Chairman of [Tractivity](#) (whom I advise) has just published a candid set of four articles about some of the frustrations of encouraging *best practice*. His solution has been a support unit that actively helps clients and others get a higher return on investment by making better use of new and exciting tools (inc AI). Read all four articles [here](#).
- An attractive, well-presented document called [Connecting Voices](#) is worth looking at. It delves into the difference between ‘*mini-publics*’ and ‘*maxi-publics*’ and identifies scope to use a variety of different variants. I like its emphasis on the scale of wider online participation, fostering greater representativeness and legitimacy. Lots of convergence in recent thinking!

Straws in the wind

The Reading List



Tom McTague’s [monumental tour de force](#) is the history of euro-scepticism and is a rollercoaster read for anyone interested in UK politics. The narrative rolls on at pace, and predictably covers Margaret Thatcher’s Bruges speech, the Maastricht rebels, the bogeyman, Jack Delors, Goldsmith’s Referendum party and the rise of UKIP’s demands for an in-out referendum. But underlying it all is the author’s assumption that the European project was always and inevitably a contradiction of England’s historical entitlement to an unfettered sovereign future. Most of those featured in this book are cast as the heroes and heroines of the struggle to regain this status. There is very little about the practical benefits that UK residents enjoyed by belonging to the European Union, or much understanding of political thinking beyond these shores. A history that extended beyond 2016 might be more critical of the forces and ideologies so well described in this book. Despite this, it’s a thoroughly enjoyable read and a worthwhile achievement.

To receive **Consultation Catch-Up** regularly **SUBSCRIBE** [here](#)

or contact Rhion – email rhion@rhion.com or call 07966 446450

Consultation GuRU is a trading name for I.H.A. Ltd. UK Company Registration No 3037502