

Queen's Speech Briefing

This briefing contains a summary of key points for local government and Solace members raised by Her Majesty in the annual Queen's speech to both Houses of Parliament.

As had been expected, today's Queen's Speech contained a lot in terms of new legislation, particularly in relation to local government. See below for further details categorised by sector. Other legislation of national significance can be seen at the end of the briefing.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Childcare Bill

The Queen outlined that the Childcare Bill will aim to help working people by increasing the provision of free childcare. The main aim of this legislation is to support working families in reducing their childcare costs and make information about the additional free childcare provision and services more accessible.

The Bill will aim to provide families with both working parents an increased entitlement to 30 hours a week of free childcare for their three- and four-year-olds for 38 weeks of the year.

This legislation will also require local authorities to publish information about the provision of childcare in each local authority area, and other services or facilities which might be of benefit to parents or prospective parents, or children or young persons in their area.

Education and Adoption Bill

The Queen announced that legislation will be introduced in order to "improve schools and give every child the best start in life." This Bill will aim to strengthen and speed up the Government's intervention powers in failing and coasting schools across the country, making it clear that schools rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted would be converted into sponsored academies. Through this Bill, the Government will give Regional Schools Commissioners powers to bring in leadership support from other excellent schools and would speed up the process of turning schools into academies.

The Bill will also introduce measures aimed to create regional adoption agencies which will operate across local authority boundaries, increasing the speed and scale at which adoption services are delivered. In order to create regional adoption agencies, this legislation will give the Secretary of State new powers to direct a number of local authorities to have adoption functions carried out on their behalf, these are: the recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters; decisions about which prospective adopters a child should be matched with; and the provision of adoption support services.

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Devolved Administrations

The Queen has announced that the Government will continue to work with the devolved administrations to devolve substantial further powers to the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and will take forward the historic agreement reached in Northern Ireland in December last year.

The Government has committed to agree a revised Memorandum of Understanding, which will govern relations between the UK Government and the devolved administrations.

The plans include a new financial settlement for Scotland, which reflects the unprecedented new powers the Scottish Government will have to raise its own taxes, as well as measures to ensure that the recovery is embedded in all parts of the UK.

Under the **Scotland Bill**, her Majesty announced new tax, fiscal and welfare powers that will be devolved to Scotland. The Government has committed to honour the commitment made to the Scottish people before last year's independence referendum to transfer significant new powers to the Scottish Parliament, making it one of the most powerful devolved parliaments in the world. The Bill will aim to deliver in full the Smith Commission Agreement.

The **Wales Bill** will deliver a clearer, more stable devolution settlement for Wales and devolve important new powers to the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government, including a new reserved powers model for Welsh devolution including a list of policies that are reserved to the UK Parliament.

The **Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill** will establish the Historical Investigations Unit, and an Oral History Archive. An additional body in the Bill, the Independent Commission for Information Retrieval, would be established by an international agreement between the UK and Irish Governments in order to provide for full and independent investigations into unsolved Troubles-related deaths, allowing individuals from throughout the UK and Ireland to share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles.

Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill

The Queen also announced the Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill, aimed to reform and modernise the Public Service Ombudsman to providing a more effective and accessible final tier of complaints redress within the public sector. The Government published a consultation on the proposal to create a single Public Service Ombudsman (alongside the Gordon Report) on 25th March 2015. This closes on 16th June. Responses to this consultation will inform the policy development process and plans for this future legislation.

The Bill is intended to allow the Public Service Ombudsman to absorb the functions of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Health Ombudsman, the Local Government Ombudsman and potentially The Housing Ombudsman and to ensure that a robust process for accountability and reporting is in place. The new Ombudsman will be independent of Government and directly accountable to Parliament. As such, this legislation will aim to establish the relevant powers for a modern ombudsman organisation.

CIVIL RESILIENCE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Policing and Criminal Justice Bill

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The Queen has announced new legislation that will deliver policing reform with the aim of enhancing protections for vulnerable people. Aspects that might be relevant to local government include ensuring that 17-year-olds who are detained in police custody are treated as children for all purposes under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE), in particular: the amendments to the provisions of PACE concerning 17-year-olds relate to drug sample taking; granting consent for a range of interventions; imposing conditional bail; and reforming legislation in relation to the detention of people under sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 to ensure better outcomes for those experiencing a mental health crisis.

Extremism Bill

The Queen has also announced new legislation on tackling extremism aimed to strengthen government and law enforcement powers to stop the promotion of views and behaviour that undermine British values, protecting the public from the serious harm and addressing the gap in government and law enforcement's powers to deal with extremism that falls below the thresholds in counter-terrorism legislation. The Bill aims to strengthen the Government's powers in a number of areas including Banning Orders; Extremism Disruption Orders, Closure Orders; Broadcasting; and Employment checks.

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Health and Social Care

The Queen announced that the Government will continue to implement the National Health Service five-year plan, increase the health budget, proceed with health and social care integration and ensure seven-day access to the NHS. Her Majesty also relayed that further "measures will be introduced to improve access to general practitioners and to mental healthcare."

The Government will aim to invest £8 billion more into the NHS per year by 2020 and it has committed to providing 18 million patients with access to a GP during evenings and weekends. The Government also intends to increase access to and improve waiting times for mental health services.

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND HOUSING

Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill

The Queen set out new legislation that will aim to provide for the "devolution of powers to cities with elected metro mayors, helping to build a Northern Powerhouse," in order to fulfil the Government's pledges on devolving more powers and budgets to increase local growth, efficiency and productivity in England and continue in the country's process of economic recovery.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill will provide the legislative framework to deliver the Greater Manchester deal and other future deals following the example of Greater Manchester. Building on the existing powers in place under the Localism Act 2011, the Bill will enable the Government to empower further city regions, building on the programme of Growth Deals which the Government implemented in the last Parliament.

This legislation will introduce generic provisions and it will allow for an elected mayor for the combined authority's area who would exercise specified functions and chair the authority; for the mayor to undertake the functions of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for the area; allow the current PCC term of office to be extended until the mayor is in place in areas where a mayor is to have PCC functions; remove the current statutory limitation on its functions related to economic development, regeneration, and transport; and enable local authority governance to be streamlined as agreed by councils.

Housing Bill

Under the Housing Bill, the Queen announced that the Government will extend the Right to Buy levels of discount to housing association tenants, and that local authorities will be required to dispose of high-value vacant council houses which will help fund the Right to Buy extension discounts and building of more affordable homes in the area. The Housing Bill will require local planning authorities to support custom and self-builders registered in their area in identifying suitable plots of land to build or commission their own home. This legislation is also aimed to provide the required statutory framework to support the delivery of Starter Homes.

In regards to housing supply, the legislation will introduce a statutory register for brownfield land with the aim to help achieve the target of getting Local Development Orders in place on 90% of suitable brownfield sites by 2020. The neighbourhood planning system will be simplified and accelerated to support communities that seek to meet local housing and development needs. The Bill will also give effect to other changes to housing and planning legislation that would enhance housing growth.

This legislation will cover England and Wales, where any application to Wales will be a decision for the Welsh Government.

Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill

Under the Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill, the Queen has set out the Government's plan to achieve full employment in the United Kingdom.

The legislation will expand the Troubled Families Programme and continue the welfare reform programme, capping benefits and requiring young people to "earn or learn". The Bill includes a duty to report annually on progress of the Troubled Families programme, seeking to place a requirement on public bodies to provide information to the Secretary of State in order that he may fulfil that duty.

The Bill will introduce a freeze on the main rates of a number of working-age benefits, tax credits and Child Benefit for two years from 2016-17, with the exemption of Statutory payments, as well as pensions and benefits related to disability costs. The new legislation would lower the benefit cap so that the total amount of benefits a non-working family can receive in a year would be £23,000.

The Bill includes a duty to report annually on progress against meeting the government's target of 3 million new apprenticeships and to provide Jobcentre Plus adviser support in schools across

England to supplement careers advice and provide routes into work experience and apprenticeships.

The legislation also puts in place a new Youth Allowance for 18-21 year olds with stronger work related conditionality from Day 1. After 6 months they will be required to go on an apprenticeship, training or community work placement; and it will remove automatic entitlement to housing support for 18-21 year olds.

Enterprise Bill

The Queen announced that new legislation will be introduced to “reduce regulation on small businesses so they can create jobs,” in order to make it easier to start and grow a business in the UK.

The main elements of this Bill relate to deregulation and increased transparency of regulators; establishing the Small Business Conciliation Service; introducing a cap on Public Sector Redundancy Pay; and the introduction of business rates appeals reform, including modifying the Valuation Tribunal powers to consider ratepayer appeals and allow for the Valuation Office Agency to share information with local government to improve the system for both local government and ratepayers.

High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill

Under the High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill announced by Her Majesty today, the Government will have the legal powers to construct and operate phase 1 of the High Speed 2 (HS2) railway. The legislation will give the Government deemed planning permission for the railway between London and the West Midlands and compulsory purchase powers and the power to temporarily take possession of land required to construct and operate the railway. This Bill will aim to help rebalance the UK economy and free up space on the UK rail network, improving connections between London, the Midlands, the North and Scotland.

Energy Bill

The Queen announced new legislation to improve energy security by giving new powers to the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) to maximise the economic recovery of oil and gas from UK waters and changes the law to give local communities a greater say in planning applications for wind farms.

Elements of the Bill relevant to local government include giving consenting powers to local planning authorities for all onshore wind farms; changing the legislation to remove the need for the Secretary of State’s consent for any large onshore wind farms; and rebalancing the power away from Whitehall by transferring the existing consenting powers, in relation to onshore wind, to local planning authorities.

These changes will be supported by changes to the national planning policy framework to give effect to the manifesto commitment that local communities should have the final say on planning applications for wind farms. The changes would not impact on the planning regime in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Other national measures that may be of interest are:

- A referendum to allow the electorate to have an in-out vote on the UK's membership of the European Union (EU) before the end of 2017.
- 'English Votes for English Laws' - Changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons that will create fairer procedures to ensure that decisions affecting England, or England and Wales, can be taken only with the consent of the majority of Members of Parliament representing constituencies in those parts of the United Kingdom.
- Future increases to the income tax personal allowance will reflect changes to the national minimum wage, so that individuals working 30 hours a week on the national minimum wage do not pay income tax.
- There will be no rises in income tax rates, VAT rates or National Insurance contributions (NICs) rates for individuals, employees and employers in the next five years.
- Reform of the UK's immigration and labour market rules in order to reduce the demand for skilled migrant labour and crack down on the exploitation of low-skilled workers.
- Reform of trade unions related to industrial action.
- Continuation of the triple lock on the basic State Pension for the duration of the Parliament.
- Modernisation of the legislation on communications data.

For more information, see the Government's Queens Speech 2014 briefing in full [here](#).