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Summary

The Queen has delivered her speech to the House of Lords setting out the Coalition Government’s programme for the next Parliamentary year. This will be the last parliamentary session before the 2015 General Election.

The speech emphasised the need to continue strengthening the economy in order to ensure security and stability for Britain: “this Queen’s Speech is unashamedly pro-work, pro-business and pro-aspiration”.

A list of the Bills and draft Bills announced in the speech are below. For further details on Bills announced, please see The Queen’s Speech: what it means for you as well as the full background briefing notes on the Queen’s Speech. You can read the full speech here.

Briefing in full

Bills relevant to local government

Infrastructure Bill

Planning

The Bill would allow certain types of planning conditions to be discharged upon application if a local planning authority has not notified the developer of their decision within a prescribed time period, reducing unnecessary delay and costs.

The Bill would simplify the process for making changes to Development Consent Orders (DCO) by speeding up non-material changes to a DCO, and allowing simplified processes for material changes.

Homes and Communities Agency

The Bill would permit land to be transferred directly from arms-length bodies to the Homes and Communities Agency, reducing bureaucracy and managing land more effectively.
The Bill would ensure that future purchasers of land owned by the Homes and Communities Agency and the Greater London Authority will be able to develop and use land without being affected by easements and other rights and restrictions suspended by the Agency.

**Transport**

The Bill would turn the Highways Agency into a Government owned company, with the stable, long term funding needed to plan ahead. It would create units within Passenger Focus and the Office of Rail Regulation to represent the interests of road users and to monitor the company’s performance.

**Land Registry Charges**

The Bill would transfer statutory responsibility for the local land charges register and delivery of local land charges searches to the Land Registry supporting the delivery of digital services and extend Land Registry’s powers to enable it to provide information and register services relating to land and other property.

**Building Regulations**

The Government would set a minimum energy performance standard through the building regulations. The remainder of the zero carbon target would be met through cost effective off-site carbon abatement measures – known as ‘allowable solutions’. Small sites, which are most commonly developed by small scale house builders, will be exempt. The definition of a small site will be consulted on shortly, and set out in regulation.

**Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill**

Legislation will be introduced to help make the United Kingdom an attractive place to start, finance and grow a business.

Aims of the Bill include:

- To make it easier for small businesses to access finance; improve payment practices between small businesses and their customers; providing small firms with fair access to the £230 billion spent each year in the form of public procurement contracts; and increase the availability and sources of finance for businesses that want to invest.

- Bring a new Statutory Code and independent Adjudicator to ensure that the sole traders and small businesses that run 20,000 or so tied pubs across England and Wales are treated fairly.

- Prevent public sector employees keeping redundancy payments when they come back to the same part of the public sector within a short period of time.

**Childcare Payments Bill**

A new scheme will be introduced that supports working families by giving support equivalent to basic rate tax relief on money spent on childcare, up to a maximum of £2,000 per year for each child. For every £8 that a parent pays for childcare, the Government will contribute £2.

To improve education attainment and child health, the government will also ensure all infants will receive a free school meal.
**Wales Bill**

The Government will continue with legislation giving the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Ministers more power over taxation and investment.

The Wales Bill:

- devolves stamp duty land tax and landfill tax to Wales, enabling the Assembly to replace them with new taxes specific to Wales
- allows further taxes to be devolved, with the agreement of Parliament and the Assembly
- provides for a referendum in Wales on whether an element of income tax should be devolved
- allows the Assembly, subject to a vote in favour in a referendum, to set a Welsh rate for the purpose of calculating the rates of income tax to be paid by Welsh taxpayers
- grants new powers for Welsh ministers to borrow to fund capital expenditure, and extends the circumstances in which they can borrow in the short term to manage fluctuations in tax revenues
- gives the Assembly the power to decide the procedure for scrutinising and authorising the Welsh government’s tax and spending plans

**Draft bill relevant to local government**

**Governance of National Parks (England) and the Broads draft Bill**

**Direct elections**

The draft Bill would enable direct elections to be held in English National Parks and the Broads, by an order of the Secretary of State.

The draft Bill would, for the first time, and when the Secretary of State so provides, enable eligible residents of the Parks to directly elect some of the Authority members responsible for running their Park and taking planning decisions. The same would apply in the Broads.

**Amending the political balance requirement on local authority appointees**

The draft Bill would also allow local authorities to depart from the political balance rule if they appoint 3 or more members to the Park (or Broads) Authority, where doing so would allow them to appoint a representative of a ward within the Park/Broads.

**Allowing a wider range of parish representation**

The draft Bill would also allow parish councils to select their representatives to a Park Authority more widely. Currently they must select a parish councillor or Meeting Chairperson. They would be enabled to include anyone eligible to stand as a parish councillor, if the Park Authority requests it, and the Secretary of State so provides.
Announcements relevant to local government

Increasing housing supply

The Government will seek to increase housing supply and home ownership by reforming the planning system, enabling new locally-led garden cities and supporting small house building firms.

The Government will provide development finance to support smaller builders to develop new homes across the country. The £525 million Builders' Finance Fund will deliver up to 15,000 further homes on small sites over the course of its programme. The Government will also scale back the imposition of Section 106 levies on small-scale development.

The Government will introduce a £150 million repayable fund to support up to 10,000 new service plots for custom-build homes, as well as consulting on how to implement a new Right to Build to give custom-builders the right to land in their local area.

The Government will help speed up the time taken for sites granted planning permission to be built out, including reforming unwieldy procedures and conditions attached to existing planning permissions, whilst protecting environmental safeguards.

The Government will amend secondary legislation to further reform change of use rules to make it easier for empty and redundant buildings to be converted into productive use, supporting brownfield regeneration and increase the supply of new homes.

The Government will introduce the secondary legislation to allow for a locally supported garden city to be built in Ebbsfleet, backed by an Urban Development Corporation. A Locally-Led Garden Cities prospectus was also published in April, outlining the support Government will offer to other areas interested in new locally led Garden Cities. The Government is also rolling out two further programmes to provide infrastructure support for large-scale, locally supported schemes.

Basic need funding for new school places

The Government is investing £5 billion in basic need over the life of this Parliament (2011-12 to 2014-15), compared to £1.9 billion in equivalent period 2007-8 to 2010-11.

We will invest over £7 billion from 2015-21. In December 2013 we announced £2.35 billion for 2015-17 as the first stage of these allocations.

We are also investing £2.5 billion through the Pupil Premium to improve education for the most deprived children.

Academies and Free Schools

In England, the Government will help more schools to become academies and support more Free Schools to open.

Apprenticeship reforms

The government will increase the total number of apprenticeship places to two million by the end of the Parliament.
Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

To improve education attainment and child health, the government will ensure all infants will receive a free school meal.

Following the Government’s announcement on 17 September 2013, the Government is introducing free school meals (FSM) for every child in reception, year 1 and year 2 in state-funded schools from September 2014.

Scotland: Case for UK and implementing new powers

The government will continue to implement new financial powers for the Scottish Parliament and make the case for Scotland to remain a part of the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland

The government will continue to work with the devolved administration in Northern Ireland to rebalance the economy, promote reconciliation and create a shared future.

Bills in full

Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill
National Insurance Contributions Bill
Infrastructure Bill
Pension Tax Bill
Private Pensions Bill
Childcare Payments Bill
Modern Slavery Bill
Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Bill
Service Complaints Bill
Serious Crime Bill
Recall of MPs Bill
Wales Bill

Draft Bills

Draft Riot (Damages) Act Bill
Draft Protection of Charities Bill
Draft Governance of National Parks (England) and the Broads Bill

More information about each of these Bills and draft Bills is available here.
Comment by Jonathan Carr-West, Chief Executive of LGiU

The Queen’s speech outlining the last legislative programme before the election in May 2015 once again underlined the Coalition’s main task of cutting the deficit. Measures to cut tax avoidance, help small businesses access finance and simplify the planning system all point to the central aim of this administration.

Two weeks after the local elections we might reflect that there is little in the next year which fundamentally changes local government. In fact, the current fiscal regime and devolutionary measures all occurred in the first years of the Coalition - local government has effectively been set to task from the start. Yet gone are the days when a speech from the Throne would entail a checklist of measures which councils would have to incorporate. Policy officers across the country will welcome the clear, if constrained steer the Government has provided.

LGiU has some concern over the proposed changes to allow developers effectively to bypass the local democratic planning system if a decision has not been given in time. The Government assumes that the blockage in development lies at the hands of local authority planners, after many years of land banking on the part of developers.

The government has announced that it will stop public sector employees from keeping redundancy payments when returning to the public sector. A popular move but could this have implications for the freedom of councils to employ, and fire, who they want to?

Free school meals will also be a project which councils will need to watch in development - the provision of kitchens and the relationship between school meals and the pupil premium will need to be worked out to give councils a clear idea of what their own spending commitment is likely to be.

The question for local government to ask is what will the Queen be announcing in a year’s time - will we see an administration of whichever political hue usher in another period of radical change? Or will the next Government send out the message ‘steady as she goes’, with a continued dribbling down of difficult funding settlements with no bargain to devolve real power?

The next year will see manifesto pledges from all parties released with promises to bring power to the people. We can’t be sure whether these ideas will prevail into the next legislative programme. In fact with nearly 60 speeches by HMQ, the one thing we can be certain of is that she will be the only person who knows which job she will be doing next year.

FURTHER NOTES

We will be following the progress of relevant Bills in the Queen’s Speech in future briefings.

The full text of the Queen’s Speech is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/queens-speech-2014

For more information, please see the LGiU briefing on what could be expected in the Queen’s Speech 2014

For more information about this, or any other LGiU member briefing, please contact Janet Sillett, Briefings Manager, on janet.sillett@lgiu.org.uk