

London Councils

The voice of London local government

The Queen's Speech 2017: briefing

Overview

The Queen's Speech has set out the government's legislative programme for a two year parliamentary session. The Speech contained 27 Bills and draft Bills, eight of which deal with the UK's departure from the European Union. This briefing highlights the Bills and announcements that will impact on London local government. Our analysis of the Bills announced today is based upon the information published so far; as more information is made available London Councils will provide further detailed briefings.

Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill

The Bill will seek to position the UK as a world leader in modern transport technologies. It will support the design and use of automated cars in the UK as well as seeking to improve the necessary infrastructure needed for electric cars.

London Councils broadly welcomes these measures and the Government's ambition to be global leaders in the electric vehicle industry. This bill will enable the increased deployment of universally available strategic electric vehicle charging infrastructure that is crucial to the wider adoption of electric vehicles. A wide-reaching electric vehicle charging network is a priority if the UK is to meet its air quality and carbon emissions reduction targets in the long term. These measures will help to improve the public's exposure to EVs and also alleviate the issue of 'range anxiety'.

We believe that the Government should work closely with industry and academic experts to set the common technical and operational standards in order to provide a high quality network, whilst allowing room for technological innovation.

London Councils requests that the Government clarifies its ambition that 'almost every car and van be zero-emission by 2050'. We would like to see a firm commitment that all vehicles be zero emission by 2050 given the challenges air pollution and climate change presents to London, this country and the planet as a whole.

Courts Bill

The Government will seek to make better use of technology in the court system in order to make the justice system more efficient.

The key elements of the Bill are to extend the use of virtual hearings to allow victims to participate in trials without having to face their alleged assailant; allow those charged with less serious criminal offences to be dealt with in advance and online to free up court time; introduce digital services to allow businesses to recover debts more easily; and to provide a better working environment for judges. These reforms would result in £226m in savings once implemented.

Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill

The Bill, which the Conservatives campaigned on in the recent General Election, will establish a Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner and introduce a legal definition of domestic abuse which will underpin all other measures in the Bill. It will also create a consolidated new domestic abuse civil prevention and protection order, and in cases of abusive behaviour where children are involved the court can issue a sentence reflective of the abuse endured.

London Councils welcomes the opportunity to strengthen the response to domestic violence in order to protect and support victims whilst ensuring that the criminal justice system can provide an adequate response. Local services provide a valuable package of support and it will be important for the government to ensure that these continue to be resourced adequately.

Smart Meter Bill

The purpose of this Bill is to allow the government to oversee the roll out of smart meters to all homes in Great Britain. The main elements of the Bill are to extend the government's ability to change smart meter regulations by five years to ensure a successful delivery and to bring greater financial protections for the companies responsible for delivering the roll out should they become insolvent.

London Councils welcomes the government's continued support for the rollout of smart meters, which could be a catalyst to behaviour change amongst consumers and increase the more efficient use of energy in homes across the country. London Councils wants to see smart meters rolled out in the shortest possible timeframes.

Draft Tenants' Fees Bill

The government has previously consulted on banning letting fees. This, they argue, would reduce upfront costs for tenants whilst also improving transparency and competition within the private rented sector.

The Bill is designed to reduce the significant and often inflated up-front financial costs that tenants currently face in the form of letting agent fees and other tenancy payments additional to rent. Whilst it is recognised that the majority of lettings agents do operate fairly, evidence shows that there is a minority that do not and a ban would eliminate the incentives and opportunities for letting agents to inflate costs. Lettings agents would be able to charge fees to landlords, who are in a stronger position than tenants to exercise their consumer power and 'shop around'. Letting agents will therefore be required to become more transparent, competitive and reduce fees. Even if landlords do decide to pass on costs to tenants in the form of increased rents, and it is not yet clear that they will, these costs should be reduced as a result of increased competition and more manageable for tenants if spread out over the length of a tenancy, rather than one large, up-front payment.

In the context of increasing challenges of affordability for tenants in the private rented sector, particularly in London, it is vital that measures to tackle these significant additional, often inflated costs are effective and London Councils welcomes the government's Draft Tenant Fees Bill and the commitment to introduce measures to enforce the ban on tenant fees. It is recognised that the successful passing of this bill will be dependent on parliamentary time, which will be significantly restricted.

Non-legislative measures

Commission for Countering Extremism

The Queen announced a Commission for Countering Extremism which will seek to identify and confront extremism whilst supporting communities and the public sector. The Commission will assist the Government in identifying new policies to tackle extremism whilst promoting and defending pluralistic British values.

We welcome the introduction of the Commission for Countering Extremism. Local government has an important role to play in tackling extremism and we will seek to engage with the Commission and its work.

Counter Terrorism Review

Following on from the recent terror attacks in Manchester and London, the government will review its counter-terrorism strategy to ensure police and security services have all the powers they need as well

as ensuring that the length of custodial sentences are sufficient. The government will also consider what further steps are needed to stem extremist material and propaganda online.

Local government has an important role to play in responding to extremism. We will continue to monitor the government's review closely.

Independent Public Advocate

The government will introduce an independent public advocate to act for bereaved families in the event of a public disaster as well as supporting them at public inquests. The key purpose is to ensure that those affected by any such incidents are kept as informed as possible and can effectively participate in any such process. A consultation will be held to ensure the role meets its required needs.

Mental Health Reform

The government will review mental health legislation and publish recommendations on where new policy could improve the rights of those experiencing mental health problems.

This will include examining why there are disproportionate levels of people from certain ethnic backgrounds detained under the Mental Health Act and assessing why rates of detention are increasing and what improvements to service responses are needed. Community Treatment Orders will be reviewed as will the rights of family members in receiving information on their loved ones and how they can be improved.

Public Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower Fire

As previously announced by the Prime Minister, the government will conduct a full public inquiry into circumstances behind the Grenfell Tower fire. This will be a full public inquiry with an appointed judge recommended to the government by the Lord Chief Justice.

Families of the deceased, residents, the Mayor of London and HM Opposition will be consulted on the terms of reference which the inquiry will proceed under. The government will agree the terms of reference which will be published in consultation with the inquiry's Chair. The Chair will determine who to call on to give evidence. The government has said it will cooperate fully.

In the meantime, the government has made a £5 million Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund available to support those whose home was destroyed as well as ensuring the cost of temporary accommodation is met on their behalf. Those that lost their homes will be rehoused as close as practically possible and with the aim of doing so within three weeks of the disaster.

Councils across London are providing support to the team working on recovery efforts following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower. London local government's established resilience arrangements have been invoked, with councils across London contributing significant resource to ensure comprehensive humanitarian assistance is available. This includes support in managing and staffing the Community Assistance Centre; running a helpline; providing mental health and wellbeing support; providing help and guidance on housing and temporary accommodation; co-ordinating donations and help in kind.

Schools and Technical Education

The Queen spoke of the government's commitment to ensure that every child has the opportunity to attend a good or outstanding school and that each school receives a fair funding arrangement. Delivering enough school places is a top priority whilst failing schools will continue to be converted into academies. A £140 million Strategic School Improvement Fund, previously announced, will be available to academies and maintained schools.

London Councils welcomes the government's commitment to ensuring that children have access to high quality education. Over the past two decades, London has seen historic improvements in educational attainment, which is why London Councils believes that the pledge to ensure that schools receive fair funding must be accompanied by sufficient investment in school budgets. The Conservative manifesto included a commitment to ensure that no school loses out as a result of the National Funding Formula and to invest an additional £4 billion in schools over the course of the parliament. Today's Queen's Speech noted that the Government would reflect on investment in public services, including schools, at future fiscal events. London Councils will continue to lobby government to ensure that the manifesto commitments

on school funding are followed through, and looks forward to Autumn Budget as an opportunity for the Chancellor to set out more clearly the Government plan for delivering funding reform under which no school loses out.

The government's focus on ensuring that there are sufficient school places is welcome. London Councils has argued that the free schools programme needs to prioritise demand for places to ensure that the basic need is met in the most cost effective way possible.

With regards to technical education, the government will invest an additional £0.5bn a year into England's technical education system. They will also deliver the Post-16 Skills Plan and all its recommendations, including the T-levels, as well as new Institutes of Technology.

We welcome the government's commitment to reform of the technical education system and further significant investment in technical education. London Councils wants to see this reform go further with devolution of skills funding, not just limited to the current proposals to devolve Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding to London, but to cover 16-18 provision, all capital funding, the Apprenticeship levy (starting with unspent levy funds) and careers information, advice and guidance. London government should determine the focus and location of new Institutes of Technology.

It is not yet clear whether all the proposals contained in the Conservative manifesto around technical education will be taken forward – for example, introducing a new right to request leave for training for all employees and further reform of the apprenticeship levy including a national retraining scheme to allow workers to gain skills needed for a changing economy, whereby government will pay for the training and employers can access the Apprenticeship Levy to support wage costs during the training period. These reforms seem not to have been included in the Queen's Speech.

Social Care

In light of social care becoming one of the most prominent issues in the General Election campaign, the government has noted the challenges an ageing population presents and has included a commitment to consult on proposals to improve social care. London Councils will monitor the issue closely.

The projected population growth for London compared to the rest of England from 2016 to 2020 is expected to be higher in the capital than other regions. The announcement of an additional £2 billion for social care was particularly welcome at a time when councils were finding it increasingly difficult to deliver services. In the short term, each borough will on average receive an additional £3.2 million of the funding, which will help to ease many of the pressures in social care particularly those arising from increasing demand and new burdens such as Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, the National living wage, pension reforms and no recourse to public funds. However, there remains a need for urgent thinking about long-term solutions to the financial challenge social care is facing.

That is why we are pleased to see the government's commitment to publish a Green Paper later this year. This will provide the sector an opportunity to explore long term solutions for the sector. London Councils officers would like to have the opportunity to work with officials as plans are developed for the Green paper.

London Councils continues to make the case that part of the long term sustainability solution has to be closer working between social care and health. London Councils is therefore calling for Government to fulfil the commitment set out in the March 2018 budget and deliver a health and care devolution agreement with London.

Contact:

Ryan Gow, Public Affairs Officer Email: ryan.gow@londoncouncils.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7934 9557

London Councils represents all 32 London boroughs and the City of London. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority are also in membership