

# QUEEN'S SPEECH 21 JUNE 2017

## SEEC-SESL Member Briefing

Today's Queen's Speech sets out the new Government's legislative agenda. The Government has extended the Parliamentary session from one to two years and cancelled the 2018 Queen's Speech 'to give MPs enough time to fully consider the laws required to make Britain ready for Brexit'.

The Speech outlines 27 Bills, including 3 draft Bills. There are also several measures not expected to need primary legislation. These set out plans for issues as diverse as social care, schools & technical education, housing, and mental health. Bills are based on 4 themes: Delivering Brexit; Building a Stronger Economy; Making our Country Fairer; and Making our Country Safer and More United.

Many Bills and measures make little or no direct mention of local government, for example the counter terrorism review has no mention of councils' role in Prevent. There is no Housing Bill but the Government aims to introduce the Housing White Paper's proposals without legislation. Consultation is expected on ways to improve and fund social care. Today's media reports on the absence of a Business Rates Bill suggest that DCLG has suspended the reform. This creates great uncertainty for all South East councils and those who were expecting to be pilot authorities.

### Delivering Brexit

The following Bills are set out to help smooth the way for Brexit:

- The **Repeal Bill** will ensure that, wherever practical, the same rules and laws apply after exit. It will also create temporary powers to add secondary legislation to laws that would not otherwise operate appropriately.

South East councils could develop an offer to take on some powers previously regulated by the EU such as waste.

- An **Immigration Bill** will establish the immigration status of European Economic Area nationals, repealing the right to free movement while still allowing the UK to attract the 'brightest and the best' from the EU.

Devolving more powers over skills funding and careers advice to South East councils could help overcome skills shortages resulting from any loss of EU workers and damage to the South East economy.

- A **Trade Bill** will put in place the legislative framework to allow the UK to operate its own trade policy.  
Many South East councillors have argued for minimal or no tariffs to underpin continued South East economic growth.
- A **Customs Bill** will ensure the UK has a standalone UK customs regime.
- A **Fisheries Bill** will enable the UK to control quotas, access to fisheries and management of its waters.
- An **Agriculture Bill** will include support for UK farmers by maintaining the same cash total for farm support until the end of the Parliament. It will also include protection for the natural environment.
- A **Nuclear Safeguards Bill** will establish a UK nuclear safeguards regime after leaving the EU.
- An **International Sanctions Bill** will enable the UK's continued compliance with international law and return decision-making powers on non-UN sanctions to the UK.
- An **EU (Approvals) Bill** will support greater co-operation with non-EU countries.

Through non-legislative measures, Ministers are committed to gaining the widest possible consensus on the country's future outside the European Union.

A key local issue will be continued access to project funding previously provided by the EU – in the period 2014-2020 the South East will receive 491m Euros. Councils will also want to seek commitments on infrastructure investment to maintain South East global economic competitiveness.

### Building a Strong Economy (& infrastructure)

5 Bills and several non-legislative measures address the economy and linked issues of funding and infrastructure. South East authorities will be keen to see more detail and understand the extent of the investment and support available to protect and grow the South East economy, as the area that contributes the most to HM Treasury.

- A **Space Industry Bill** will support this growing economic sector through licensing, and ensuring safety, of new commercial spaceflight options, eg. vertically-launched rockets, spaceplanes, satellite operation and spaceports.

This offers opportunities for the South East, which hosts a large aerospace sector and has pioneered new technology for modern satellites eg Surrey Space Centre and Science Vale UK.

- A **National Insurance Contributions Bill** will introduce changes announced at Budget/Autumn Statement 2016 to make the system simpler and fairer.
- An **Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill** will ensure the UK remains at the forefront of developing new vehicle technology. It will cover regulation, installation of charging points and will extend compulsory motor vehicle insurance to automated vehicles.
- A **High Speed 2 Phase 2A Bill** sets out powers to build and operate the next stage of the HS2 network between Birmingham and Crewe.
- A **Smart Meter Bill** will help deliver more transparent energy bills and allow households to monitor use.

Non-legislative measures include:

- **Public finances.** The Government remains committed to a balanced budget and low taxes. Action to strengthen the economy – including through the Industrial Strategy – aims to grow jobs and tax revenues to invest in public services. Commitment continues to a £23bn National Productivity Investment Fund for transport, digital communications, research & development and housing between 2017/18 and 2021/22. This was announced in Autumn Statement 2016.

In the SE many councils want more flexibility to raise funding for local infrastructure projects to help fill the South East's estimated £15.4bn infrastructure funding gap by 2030.

- **Housing.** The Government will progress the White Paper's proposals to build more market and affordable homes, aiming to slow the rise in housing costs relative to the rise in wages, and bring down the cost of renting. Proposed actions include releasing more land for homes where people want to live; building homes faster; and getting more people building homes. There will be consultation on actions to promote fairness for leaseholders.  
SEEC's response to the White Paper and recent 'Unlock the housing blockers' report emphasised that councils' commitment to growth is held-back by developers who are slow to build. There were at least 67,000 unbuilt homes in the South East by 2015. Councils need tools to tackle this and the ability to help finance more affordable homes as the average price for SE homes is around 12 times average earnings, 2nd only to London.
- **Schools and Technical Education.** The Government wants every child to attend a good school, and is committed to progressing Fairer Funding. Funding will continue for extra local authority school places (£5.8bn to 2020), free schools, and the Strategic School Improvement Fund for academies/maintained schools (£140m). The Government will invest an extra £0.5bn pa in England's technical education system, progressing the Post-16 Skills Plan, new Institutes of Technology, and new apprenticeships.  
South East members have previously emphasised the importance of the right mix of schools, with councils having greater powers to help ensure there are sufficient pupil places for both academic and vocational qualifications.
- **Critical National Infrastructure.** Proposals to ensure that foreign ownership of companies controlling important infrastructure does not undermine British security or essential services.

## Making Our Country Fairer

7 Bills set out plans for a fairer society:

- The **Draft Tenants' Fees Bill** will seek to ban unfair tenant fees, promote fairness and transparency, and increase competition in the housing market.  
The current scale and frequency of fees for renting a suitable home can prevent access to the market, particularly in the South East where rents are generally very high, thereby hindering employees' efforts to live near job opportunities.
- A **Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill** will aim to protect the victims of domestic violence and abuse.  
This might have implications for local authorities in identifying cases of abuse, assisting victims and providing short-term and on-going care.
- The **Courts Bill** will modernise the courts and tribunal systems, to improve access to justice, making better use of technology and modernising working practices.  
Local authority costs in court cases might be reduced, as might the time taken up by such cases.
- The **Civil Liability Bill** will seek to ensure there is a fair, transparent and proportionate system of compensation for damages paid to genuinely injured personal injury claimants.
- The **Financial Guidance & Claims Bill** will establish a new arm's-length Single Financial Guidance Body that will replace 3 existing providers of publicly funded financial guidance. This aims to improve the UK's financial capability by providing a more joined-up service to help people make effective financial decisions.
- A **Goods Mortgages Bill** will continue recent work to deliver a better consumer credit market that offers a good deal for consumers by modernising outdated legislation.
- The **Travel Protection Bill** aims to improve protection for holidaymakers by updating the UK's financial protection scheme for holidays. It will address the fact that more trips are booked online and replace the loss of European protection by allowing companies to trade under the UK's Air Travel Organisers' Licence (ATOL).

Non-legislative measures include:

- Confirmation of a **Public Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower Fire.** The Government will appoint a judge to chair it. The Inquiry's report will be published to the Prime Minister and Parliament. Interim findings will provide a basis for early action.
- To support victims of public disasters the Government will introduce an **Independent Public Advocate.** The Advocate will act for bereaved families, support them at public inquests and keep them informed of progress and how they can contribute to investigations. The Advocate will be able to access information held by public bodies and will, where appropriate, report on or share that information with representatives of the victims.

South East councils may want to contribute to Government's consultation on these proposals to ensure the important role of local authorities in disaster response is recognised.

- On **social care**, the Government will work with partners to bring forward consultation proposals to ensure the care system is able to meet the challenges of the growing ageing population.  
This is a key issue for South East local authorities. The SE has England's largest and most rapidly growing number of older people, with over-75s nearly doubling from 805,000 in 2017 to 1.5m by 2039.
- The **National Living Wage** will be increased to 60% of median earnings by 2020. After 2020 it will continue to increase so that these workers benefit from the same improvements in earnings as the average worker. The Government will also seek to enhance Workers' Rights and Protections.  
This will have implications for local authority costs, especially in services such as social care and public health.
- The Government will tackle the **Gender Pay Gap and Discrimination** against people on the basis of their race, faith, gender, disability or sexual orientation. The Government will consider the recommendations of recent or on-going reviews, including those on race in the workplace and Dame Louise Casey's review on how to boost opportunity and integration in isolated and deprived communities. The Government will bring forward plans for tackling these issues through a new integration strategy, using the Social Value Act 2012 in central government procurement and through the development of the wider Industrial Strategy.  
These proposals might have implications for roles, responsibilities and resources of local authorities.

## Making our Country Safer and More United

- A **Data Protection Bill** will modernise the way law enforcement data is used, update rules on non-law enforcement data, replace the Data Protection Act 1988 and strengthen people's rights over personal data. *This could have significant financial and management implications for South East local authorities if major updates are required for councils' large scale systems, which hold data on the South East's 9.1million residents.*
- An **Armed Forces Bill** will allow more flexible employment to help recruitment and retention of service personnel. It will include opportunities for part time roles, flexible return from parental leave and more local postings.
- A **Draft Patient Safety Bill** will give statutory powers to a Health Service Safety Investigation Body to investigate NHS patient safety. Unless there is an ongoing risk or evidence of criminality, the Bill will restrict disclosure of evidence to encourage honesty.

Additional non-legislative measures include:

- A **review of counter terrorism** to ensure everything possible is done to address terror threats. This will cover police and security services' powers, prison sentence length and how to restrict extremist material online. *South East local authorities will have experience to contribute to the review on operation of the Prevent Strategy.*
- A **new Commission for Countering Terrorism** will be created to identify and expose extremism, help Government develop new anti-extremist policies and support the public sector in promoting tolerance. *South East local authorities may wish to press for representation on the Commission.*
- A **Digital Charter** will be created to make the UK the safest place to run a digital business or to be online. Government will work with technology companies on the charter to balance freedom with the need for security.
- The Government will consider what further reform of **mental health** legislation is necessary, including changes in how the Act is implemented on the ground. It will also ensure that mental health is prioritised in the NHS in England. *South East authorities may want to provide views and evidence to inform this review.*
- Following concerns about the impact of a Conservative/ DUP deal, the Queen's Speech includes a commitment to work with all parties to support the return of devolved Government to Northern Ireland.
- Continued commitment was made to the Armed Forces Covenant and to spending 2% of GDP on defence.

## Other measures

The Speech also set out the need for finance Bills to implement Budget decisions. These will include a **Summer Finance Bill 2017** on tax measures and tax avoidance and a **Technical Bill** to ratify minor EU agreements. Further Bills may be announced later to support work on leaving the EU.