

Today's Queen's speech outlines a programme of 15 Bills (including 3 draft Bills) for the 2014-15 parliamentary session. Described by the Coalition as 'pro-work, pro-business and pro-aspiration', key topics include: the economy, investment in infrastructure, reform to pensions and annuities and social justice.

### 1. Legislation to build a stronger economy

**Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill (England and Wales)** – Designed to introduce measures to support small businesses and improve fairness for lower paid workers. Legislation will cut bureaucracy, reducing delays in employment tribunals, increasing transparency in company ownership and requiring Ministers to set and report against a deregulation target for each Parliament. Small firms are to have fair access to £230bn of public procurement contracts and better access to finance. Pub tenants are set to benefit from a new statutory code of conduct and a regulator to arbitrate between pub companies and tenants. Lower paid workers will get a fairer deal through measures to address zero-hour contracts and higher penalties on employers who fail to pay the minimum wage. Highly paid public sector workers will be prevented from keeping redundancy payments if they return to a job in the sector within 12 months. Changes affecting small businesses are positive for the large number of SMEs in the SE. In 2012, the SE had the highest percentage of micro businesses in England at around 90%. SE authorities are already opening up procurement; for example, Surrey is targeting 60% of spend locally by 2017.

**Infrastructure Bill** – Intended to speed up the delivery of key infrastructure and reform aspects of planning to support economic competitiveness. The Bill will support the extraction of shale gas by allowing companies to exploit gas reserves under privately owned land, subject to consultation currently underway. Changes could impact the SE where there are potentially large shale gas resources, particularly in the Weald Basin which runs from Kent through Surrey and Sussex to Hampshire.

Legislation will also support long-term investment in major roads by converting the Highways Agency into a government-owned company, giving it greater funding certainty and commercial freedoms. Transport infrastructure in the SE is an essential network for businesses UK wide and internationally. SESL and SEEC's Mind the Gap project has identified a 10-point programme of SE strategic corridors and international gateways in need of investment to protect and enhance national economic success.

A number of changes are proposed to help deliver housing and other development including:

- transferring local land charges registers and searches from councils to the Land Registry, affecting council income.
  - allowing certain planning conditions to be discharged if a council has not notified the developer of their decision in time.
  - allowing the Homes and Communities Agency to assume control of land directly from other agencies.
  - improving energy efficiency of homes through introduction of a Zero Carbon Standard into Building Regulations from 2016 and allowing construction firms to "offset" the carbon emissions of new homes. Small sites will be exempt.
  - Government will also progress its commitments to supporting new Garden cities and small house building firms.
- The SE builds the most homes in England (19,700 in 2012-13, 1,100 more than London), to help accommodate our large and growing population. There are already plans for a new Garden City in Ebbsfleet, Kent.

**National Insurance Contributions Bill** – New powers to tackle avoidance and simplify collection from the self-employed.

### 2. Legislation to support older people

**Pensions Tax Bill** – Intended to legislate for changes announced in the Budget, including removing tax restrictions so that people aged 55+ with defined contribution pensions can draw down any amount of their pension pot at any time. No one will have to buy a guaranteed lifetime annuity. Pensioners will be able to take a quarter of their pension pot tax free on retirement and anything additional taken out will be taxed at normal marginal tax rates. These changes are positive for the SE's larger than average elderly and ageing populations, with 1.67m people over 65.

**Private Pensions Bill** – This will enable people to contribute to collective pension funds, shared with other workers to spread risk, and introduce a 'right to advice' for those approaching retirement with defined contribution pensions.

### 3. Legislation to support a fairer society

**Modern Slavery Bill (England and Wales)** – A draft Bill was published in December 2013 and subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee. The Bill, which will consolidate existing criminal offences relating to slavery, is intended to strengthen powers to prevent modern slavery and trafficking while improving support for victims. Measures include: **a new duty on local authorities to report potential victims of trafficking to the National Crime**

**Agency**, tougher sentences for those convicted of the most serious offences and creation of an Anti-slavery Commissioner to coordinate the response of law-enforcement agencies.

**Childcare Payments Bill** – Designed to help working families with childcare costs by giving parents earning less than £150k pa and with children under 12 an entitlement to receive 20% of their childcare costs up to a maximum of £2,000 per child pa from autumn 2015. For every £8 paid in childcare costs, the state will provide a £2 top-up. This will replace the existing employer-supported childcare scheme.

**Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Bill (England and Wales)** - Designed to give extra legal protection for people who have acted heroically / carried out good deeds for the benefit of others but end up being sued.

**Armed Forces (Service Complaints and Financial Assistance) Bill** – Designed to improve the complaints system in the Armed Forces by replacing the Service Complaints Commissioner with a new Service Complaints Ombudsman. New powers will allow charitable donations to be made to organisations supporting the armed forces. *Changes are relevant to the SE, parts of which have large armed forces populations (e.g. Hampshire has approx. 30,000 people serving / employed by the armed forces and the county hosts the largest concentration of veterans in the UK).*

**Serious Crime Bill (mainly England and Wales)** – Designed to introduce measures to combat organised crime and child neglect. These include new offences for participating in an organised crime group, being in possession of “paedophilic manuals” and emotionally abusing children. The Bill will also introduce tough sentences for cybercrime. Habitual, as well as permanent, residents performing female genital mutilation will be liable for prosecution, as will those suspected of attending terrorist training camps or committing other acts to support terrorism.

#### 4. Legislation to support political reform

**Recall of Members of Parliament Bill** - Intended to give voters powers to trigger an election where an MP is convicted of an offence and receives a custodial sentence of less than 12 months. To trigger a vote 10% of registered constituents must sign a petition over 8 weeks.

**Draft Governance of National Parks (England) and Broads Bill** – Designed to provide direct elections for some members of National Park authorities in England. Local authorities nominating more than three members will also be able to nominate local candidates, even if this departs from normal rules on political balance.

#### 5. Draft Bills for pre-legislative scrutiny

**Draft Riot (Damages) Bill (England and Wales)** - Intended to clarify compensation measures for those whose property is damaged by riots. Subject to consultation, damage to vehicles would be covered but a cap on payments to large businesses and their insurers would be introduced. A riots-claims bureau could also be established.

**Draft Protection of Charities Bill (England and Wales)** – Intended to strengthen the powers of the Charities Commission to tackle those abusing rules and presenting a “known risk”. Proposals will be subject to consultation.

**Wales Bill (Wales)** – Carried over from the previous session, this Bill will devolve a range of new tax and borrowing powers to the Welsh Assembly. *The SE population is more than twice that of Wales and its economy is significantly stronger (SE GVA per head of the population was £22,369 compared to £15,696 in Wales in 2011). The SE believes similar powers should be given to English local government.*

#### 6. Other Measures:

**Education** - Investment in school places, further reform to GCSEs and A Levels, increase apprenticeships to 2 million. **The tax system** – introduce Budget measures to: introduce a married couple’s allowance, further increase the personal allowance and freeze fuel duty. An updated Charter for Budget Responsibility will be brought forward.

**European Union** – promote reform and champion efforts to secure a global agreement on climate change.

#### 7. Six Bills have been carried forward from the previous session (including the Wales Bill, see above)

**Criminal Justice and Courts Bill** – Amendments are due to introduce an offence of police corruption, supplementing the existing offence of misconduct in public office. The Bill is currently at Report Stage in the Commons.

**High Speed 2 Hybrid Bill** – Designed to give Government power to compulsorily purchase land needed to construct HS2. On 29 April, the High Speed Rail Select Committee was appointed giving SE opportunity to object to the Bill’s provisions and seek amendments.

**Consumer Rights Bill** – Introduced to Parliament in January 2014 and in Report Stage in the Commons.

**Deregulation Bill** – Designed to reduce regulation on businesses, individuals and the public sector. The Bill is currently at Report Stage in the Commons.

**Finance (No. 2) Bill** – Intended to amend the law relating to the National Debt and the Public Revenue. Introduced following the Chancellor’s Budget 2014.