

THE KING'S SPEECH - 17 JULY 2024

Summary - Policy and Intelligence Team



INTRODUCTION

The King's Speech set out the Government's legislative priorities for the coming parliamentary year. The forthcoming legislative programme will be mission led and based upon the principles of security, fairness and opportunity for all. Bills that are particularly relevant to Plymouth City Council and its partners are outlined below.

EDUCATION

Education policy was at the forefront of Labour's first King's speech since 2009. The pre-eminence of education was reasserted in Labour's first steps for change with their 6th step stressing that, once in Government, they would recruit 6,500 extra teachers. This will be achieved through removing the VAT exemption for private schools a measure that is anticipated be announced as part of the Budget.

In response to Labour's King's speech, Helen Dickinson, Chief Executive of the British Retail Consortium, welcomed reform of the apprenticeship levy and the establishment of Skills England. However, she noted that the BRC hoped that the new Growth and Skills Levy will use its funds to meet the demands of the 'modern workforce.' Dani Payne of the Social Market Foundation (SMF) revealed that while simplifying the skills system through Skills England is a welcome development, it will not be an easy task.

Children's Wellbeing Bill will:

- Strengthen multi-agency child protection and safeguarding arrangements.
- Introduce free breakfast clubs in every primary school.
- Limit the number of branded items of uniform and PE kits that a school can require.
- Create a duty on local authorities to have and maintain Children Not in School registers and to provide support to home-educating parents.
- Require all schools to cooperate with the local authority on school admissions, SEND inclusion, and place planning, giving local authorities greater powers to help them deliver their school admissions function and ensure admissions decisions reflect community needs.
- Require all schools to teach the national curriculum once the review of curriculum and assessment is concluded and reflected in Programmes of Study.
- Ensure that any new teacher entering the classroom has, or is working towards, Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).
- Recognise the essential role of support staff in schools by giving them a national voice in the setting of their pay and conditions.
- Make changes to enable serious teacher misconduct to be investigated, regardless of when it occurred, the setting the teacher is employed in, or how it is uncovered.
- Bring multi-academy trusts into the inspection system.
- Make changes to the legislation about regulating and inspecting independent schools.

Skills England Bill will:

- Ensure that Skills England works with industry, the Migration Advisory Committee, unions and the Industrial Strategy Council to maintain a comprehensive assessment of skills needs.
- Identify the training for which the Growth and Skills Levy will be accessible.
- Ensure that the national and regional skills systems are aligned and use local and regional vacancy data as part of a robust evidence base to ensure they are meeting skills needs.

- Require Skills England to convene MCAs and other key stakeholders to identify system issues and provide advice to Government, leading to a more coherent system.
- Ensure that Skills England takes on several of the functions of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The English Devolution Bill will establish a more ambitious standardised devolution framework for English devolution with greater powers over strategic planning, local transport networks, skills, and employment support. The Social Market Foundation highlighted that greater devolution is 'a key driver of economic growth'. Public sector membership organisation Solace has welcomed the Bill but has said it 'must mean proper devolution to all areas and not just delegation'.

English Devolution Bill will:

- Give local leaders the tools they need to drive growth with new powers and duties to produce Local Growth Plans
- Make devolution the default setting for areas that meet the governance conditions without the need to negotiate agreements.
- Establish a simpler process for creating new Combined and Combined County Authorities, to ensure that areas can rapidly benefit from devolution.
- Establish a legislative foundation with a weighting towards creating advanced mayoral settlements where there is the capacity and ambition to do so.
- Improve and unblock local decision, ensuring mayors and Combined Authorities can get on and deliver for their areas.
- Empower local communities with a strong new 'right to buy' for valued community assets.

HOUSING, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Streamlining the planning process is at the heart of the broader Government agenda to tackle housing shortages and make home ownership more attainable for the majority. However, the decision to take powers away from local areas to block new infrastructure has faced criticism. The legislation will allow ministers to step in when local authorities do not create plans to build housing quickly enough, meaning that communities can debate only 'how, and not if' homes are built.

The Government will also introduce tough new protections for renters, end no fault evictions and raise standards to make sure homes are safe for people to live in. Homeless charity Crisis has welcomed the proposals in relation to rental reform and the banning of no-fault evictions.

The Draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill looks to reform the leasehold system through the inclusion of things like a ban on extortionate ground rents and on the sale of new leasehold flats. The Holocaust Memorial Bill has the straightforward aim of establishing a national Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre sometime within the next parliament.

Planning and Infrastructure Bill will:

- Streamline the delivery process for critical infrastructure including upgrades to the national grid and boosting renewable energy.
- Simplify the consenting process for major infrastructure projects and enable relevant new and improved National Policy Statements to come forward with a review process every five years.
- Reform compulsory purchase compensation rules.
- Improve local planning decision making by modernising planning committees.
- Increase local planning authorities' capacity.
- Use development to fund nature recovery.

Renters' Rights Bill will:

- Overhaul the private rented sector and abolish Section 21 'no fault evictions.'
- Strengthen tenants' rights and protections by empowering them to challenge rent increases.
- Strengthen local councils' enforcement powers.
- Apply a Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector.
- Apply 'Awaab's Law' to the sector setting clear legal expectations about the timeframes within which landlords in the private rented sector must make homes safe from serious hazards.
- Create a digital database to bring together key information for private landlords, tenants, and councils who will be able to use the database to target enforcement where it is needed most.
- Support quicker, cheaper resolution of disputes with a new ombudsman service to stop them escalating to costly court proceedings.
- Make it illegal for landlords to discriminate against tenants in receipt of benefits or with children when choosing to let their property.
- Give tenants the right to request a pet, which landlords cannot unreasonably refuse.

Other Bills in this section include:

- Draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill.
- Holocaust Memorial Bill.

TRANSPORT

Several transport measures were included, including the Government's decision to reform the bus network to give more power over routes and timetables to local leaders. In response, the Confederation of Passenger Transport said that the bus industry will 'work closely with the new Government to help transform the sector'.

The speech also confirmed Labour's intention to introduce a Railways Bill, which will set up the framework to allow the Government to bring railways into public ownership under Great British Railways (GBR). Rail Partners have called today's commitment an 'important milestone' but warn that getting the detail right is 'critical to achieve the Government's ambitions for green growth and reduce the railway's financial burden on the taxpayer'.

Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill will:

- Act as an early step towards the wider programme of rail reform.
- Set public-sector operators as the default position.
- Make sure train operations transfer to a public-sector operator as soon as existing contracts expire, or operators fail to meet their commitments.

Better Buses Bill will:

- Deliver the Government's five-point plan to build better bus networks across England:
 - Allow every community to take back control of their buses by removing barriers that currently limit bus franchising powers only to metro mayors.
 - Speed up the bus franchising process.
 - Remove the restriction on the creation of new publicly owned bus companies.
 - Safeguard local bus services by providing greater accountability over bus operators.
 - Handing powers on bus funding and future transport planning to local leaders.

Railways Bill will:

- Bring together in a single public body - Great British Railways (GBR) - the management of the network and the delivery of passenger services.
- Bring track and train together and combine planning services on a whole-system basis.
- Enable the Government to bring contracts into public ownership as they end or if operators fail to meet their commitments.

- Immediately set up a 'shadow GBR' to operate during the transition.
- Introduce measures to protect the interests of passengers, including a new passenger watchdog, the Passenger Standards Authority and a reformed ticketing system.
- Impose on GBR a statutory duty to promote the use of rail freight.

Other bills in this section include:

- High Speed Rail (Crewe to Manchester) Bill.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

The Great British Energy Bill will see the establishment of a publicly owned clean energy company, headquartered in Scotland. The Bill will help deliver the party's mission to make the UK 'a clean energy superpower' and accelerate the transition to net zero. The Bill was warmly welcomed by Energy UK, who have praised the Government's commitment to 'hit the ground running.'

The Water Special Measures Bill aligns with Labour's manifesto commitment to strengthen the powers of water regulators. The law was positively received by Friends of the Earth, who agree tougher action needs to be taken against polluting water executives. Clean air did not feature in the speech, and there was no specific mention of phasing out the sale of petrol and diesel cars, or legislation relating to electric vehicles.

Great British Energy Bill will

- Establish a publicly owned energy company, Great British Energy (GBE).
- Help to deliver the clean energy target by 2030 and bolster the UK's energy security.
- GBE capitalised with £8.3 billion to help to accelerate investment into clean energy.

HEALTH

Labour will use this Parliamentary session to press on with anti-smoking legislation and reform of the Mental Health Act. The Draft Mental Health Bill has already gone through extensive pre-legislative scrutiny and the Bill may take into consideration recommendations made by the Joint Committee. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill is like that introduced in the last parliament to create a 'smoke free generation'. The government is committed to restricting the sale and advertisement of junk food and high caffeine energy drinks but there was no mention of specific legislation to achieve this.

Mental Health Bill will amend the Mental Health Act 1983 by:

- Revising the detention criteria to ensure that people can only be detained if they pose a serious risk of harm to themselves or others.
- Shortening the period in which a patient can be kept in detention and ensure more frequent reviews of detention.
- Limiting the extent to which people with learning disabilities or autism can be detained under the Mental Health Act by introducing duties on commissioners and ensuring adequate supply of community services to prevent inappropriate detentions.
- Adding statutory weight to patients' rights when planning for care.
- Strengthening statutory roles which protect patients and extending access to Independent Mental Health Advocates.
- Removing police stations as places of safety under the Mental Health Act.

Tobacco and Vapes Bill will:

- Introduce a progressive smoking ban to end the sale of tobacco products across the country. Children born on or after 1 January 2009 will never be able to legally purchase cigarettes.
- Give Ministers powers to regulate the marketing of vapes and other nicotine products to prevent them from being marketed to children.

- Provide enforcement authorities in England and Wales with the power to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for the underage sale of tobacco or vape products.

DEFENCE

The Government confirmed a commitment to supporting NATO, the nuclear deterrent, providing aid to the Ukraine and endeavouring to play a leading role in providing Ukraine with a clear path to NATO membership. The Government will urgently conduct a Strategic Defence Review to ensure that the UK's defence capabilities are matched to the changing nature of global strategic threats.

In recognition of the dedication and service of the UK Armed Forces, the Labour Government will establish an Armed Forces Commissioner to support and act as an independent voice for the armed forces community. The Commissioner will be a point of contact for serving personnel and their families and tasked with representing their individual and collective needs.

Armed Forces Commissioner Bill will:

- Create a new point of contact for armed forces to express any issues with service life.
- Ensure Parliament is kept up to date with issues facing the armed forces personnel, with annual reports to ensure accountability.
- Grant the Commissioner access to MoD sites and other relevant information to inspect and identify issues as necessary.

ECONOMY AND BUSINESS

Labour's first mission is to 'secure the highest sustained growth in the G7'. Labour wants growth to be the key theme of its first year in office.

The Budget Responsibility Bill will introduce a 'fiscal lock' to reinforce market credibility and public trust. Any significant and permanent changes to taxation or spending will be subject to an independent assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). The National Wealth Fund Bill will capitalise the fund with an additional £7.3 billion, to make transformative investments across every part of the country. To ensure investments can start immediately, the Fund will deploy funding through the UK Infrastructure Bank.

The Government will also legislate to deliver the new deal for working people in full. The Employment Rights Bill will deliver on policies as set out in the Plan to Make Work Pay including commitments to establish a Fair Pay Agreement in the adult social care sector and to reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body. In addition, the Government will deliver a genuine living wage that accounts for the cost of living and remove discriminatory age bands to ensure that every adult worker benefits. It has been reported that the Bill, could be a burden for smaller businesses and the CBI has stressed the importance of meaningful consultation on the details.

Labour will press ahead with audit reform which has been long delayed. The Pension Schemes Bill comes after lengthy consultation under the previous government while the Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill will ensure the Bank of England can better respond to small bank failures and ensure that managing the failure does not fall on taxpayers.

Budget Responsibility Bill will:

- Deliver on the manifesto commitment to introduce a "fiscal lock" that requires every fiscal event which makes significant and permanent changes to taxation or spending to be subject to an independent assessment by the OBR.
- Prevent large-scale unfunded commitments that are not subject to an OBR fiscal assessment.

National Wealth Fund Bill will:

- Put the National Wealth Fund (NWF) on a permanent statutory footing.

- The NWF will play a central role in the Government's industrial strategy, growth and clean energy superpower missions, making investments across the country.
- The NWF will invest in the priority sectors set out in the manifesto.
- The Fund will deploy funding through the UK Infrastructure Bank, expanding its remit and providing an additional £7.3bn to catalyse private investment.
- Align critical institutions like the UK Infrastructure Bank and British Business Bank.

Employment Rights Bill will:

- Deliver the New Deal for Working People in full.
- Deliver on policies as set out in the Plan to Make Work Pay. The plan includes the following commitments:
 - Ban zero-hour contracts and end 'Fire and Rehire' and 'Fire and Replace'.
 - Make parental leave, sick pay and protection from unfair dismissal available from day 1 on the job for all workers.
 - Make flexible working the default from day 1 for all workers.
 - Strengthen Statutory Sick Pay by lowering earnings limit.
 - Make it unlawful to dismiss a woman who has had a baby for six months after her return to work, except in specific circumstances.
 - Establishing a new Single Enforcement Body, also known as a Fair Work Agency.
 - Establish a Fair Pay Agreement in the adult social care sector.
 - Reinstate the School Support Staff Negotiating Body.
 - Update trade union legislation and simplify the process of statutory recognition.

Product Safety and Metrology Bill will:

- Respond to new product risks and opportunities to keep pace with technological advances.
- Identify new and emerging business models in the supply chain.
- Ensure that the law can be updated to recognise new or updated EU product regulations.
- Enable improvements to compliance and enforcement of digital borders.
- Update the legal metrology framework, governing the accuracy of weights and measures for purchased goods.
- Give the Government specific powers to make changes to GB legislation to manage divergence and take a UK-wide approach, where it is in our interests to do so.

Draft Audit Reform and Corporate Governance Bill will:

- Replace the Financial Reporting Council with a new regulator, the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority, with powers to tackle bad financial reporting and to build trust.
- This statutory regulator will provide a platform for other changes:
 - extending Public Interest Entity (PIE) status to the largest private companies.
 - removing unnecessary rules on smaller Public Interest Entities.
 - powers to investigate and sanction company directors for serious failures.
 - a regime to oversee the audit market.

The Crown Estate Bill will:

- Grant The Crown Estate the power to borrow.
- Widen The Crown Estate's existing investment powers.
- Change the source of funding for expenses and salaries.
- Increase the maximum number of Commissioners on The Crown Estate Board from 8 to 12.

Other Bills in this section include:

- Bank Resolution (Re-capitalisation) Bill.
- Pension Schemes Bill.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Although the King's Speech referred to the Government's plans to bring forward appropriate legislation to regulate AI this was not included in the list of bills. However, the UK's impending digital transition and the importance of data security and protecting against cyber-attacks in that transition was recognised. These bills have largely been supported by industry, the Data and Marketing Association (DMA) stressed the significance of 'responsible' use of data to help 'public services, advancements in scientific and medical research, and growth in the private sector'.

Digital Information and Smart Data Bill will:

- Set up Smart Data schemes to enable secure sharing of a customer's data upon their request, with authorised third-party providers.
- Make changes to the Digital Economy Act to help the Government share data about businesses that use public services.
- Move to an electronic system for the registration of births and deaths.
- Apply information standards to IT suppliers in the health and social care system.
- Modernise and strengthen the ICO.
- Promote standards for digital identities around privacy, security and inclusion.
- Establish a Data Preservation Process that coroners can initiate when they decide it is necessary and appropriate to support their investigations into a child's death.

Cyber Security and Resilience Bill will:

- Expand the remit of current regulation to protect more digital services and supply chains.
- Put regulators on a strong footing to ensure essential cyber safety measures are being implemented.
- Mandate increased incident reporting to give the government better data on cyber-attacks.

EQUALITIES

Labour have committed to introducing mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting and extending the scope of the conversion therapy ban introduced by the last Government to make it trans inclusive.

Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will:

- Introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting for employers with over 250 employees.
- Enshrine in law the full right to equal pay for disabled people and ethnic minorities.

Draft Conversion Practices Bill will:

- Introduce new criminal offences to target conversion which is not already covered by legislation.
- The ban will not cover legitimate psychological support, treatment, or non-directive counselling.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Despite the broad scope of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the King's speech in this policy domain was surprisingly narrow as it only detailed one bill that will be sponsored by the Department: a Football Governance Bill. Labour's sector vision for the creative industries was not mentioned and although King's Speech detailed that the Government planned to introduce legislation to regulate AI, this was not included in the list of bills for this parliamentary session.

HOME AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

As anticipated, the King's Speech included a commitment to end the Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda. The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill includes a

commitment to introduce the new Border Security Command. The Bill aims to strengthen national security by enhancing border security and bringing people smugglers to justice whilst ending hotel use and clearing the asylum backlog.

The commitment to strengthen community policing is aligned with the Prime Minister's long-term vision to be tough on crime. Labour has committed to raising standards within the police force as well as reforming it. However, the legislation does not address issues with retaining police officers. The new Bill did not commit to making spiking a specific criminal offence but tackling violence against women and girls was not forgotten with the mention of measures to improve the police response.

The implementation of the Hillsborough Law will place a legal duty of candour on public servants and authorities with the aim of addressing the so-called 'unacceptable defensive culture', something that is often linked with inquiries such as the Infected Blood, Post Office and Grenfell. Labour have placed it as part of their wider effort to create a politics of public service.

Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill will:

- Enable stronger borders and a properly controlled and managed asylum system.
- Give the new Border Security Command and wider law enforcement the tools and powers they need to crack down on criminal gangs.
- Provide a strong deterrent and penalty for criminals involved in organised immigration crime.
- Fix the asylum system by things like ending hotel use, ensuring fast-track returns for individuals coming from safe countries and ending the Migration and Economic Development Partnership.

Crime and Policing Bill will:

- Rebuild neighbourhood policing by getting neighbourhood police and Police Community Support Officers back on the beat in local communities.
- Crack down on anti-social behaviour through the introduction of new Respect Orders and fast-track Public Spaces Protection Orders.
- Create a new specific offence of assaulting a shopworker and introduce stronger measures to tackle low level shoplifting.
- Tackle knife crime and ban ninja swords and other lethal blades.
- Provide a stronger, specialist response to violence against women and girls.

Hillsborough Law will:

- Improve transparency and accountability.
- Reducing the culture of defensiveness in the public sector.
- Help ensure that the lack of candour uncovered in recent reports is not repeated.

Other bills in this section include:

- Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill.