



THE KING'S SPEECH 2024

Labour's first King's Speech: big but disciplined

The new government has set out its legislative agenda for the first session of Parliament and underlined its central priorities for the months ahead.

The King's Speech and accompanying documents included a total of 40 Bills, two of which were carried over from the previous Parliament. This is a considerable amount of legislation – there have not been so many Bills announced at the State Opening of Parliament since Labour was last in government, in 2005.

Its programme is built around the government's five cross-cutting missions of boosting economic growth, scaling up clean energy, tackling crime, breaking down barriers to opportunity, and supporting the NHS.

With the exception of Labour's flagship workers' rights legislation and its ambitious planning reforms, it is a programme which demonstrates a fairly cautious approach from the Prime Minister and his inner circle. While there is a lot of legislation, a lot of the intended benefits of many of these Bills will not be felt by the electorate for quite some time.

Clearly reflecting on the scale of the task it faces, especially regarding public services, the new government has opted for a couple of big, impactful announcements to demonstrate its ability to create the change Labour promised during the general election campaign. But aside from these, it has been careful not to be seen to over promise.

While Labour's newly swelled backbenches had a broadly disciplined response to the King's Speech, there was nevertheless a clear push back from the party rank and file on the government's decision not to announce the rollback of the two child benefit cap now that Labour is in government with a significant majority. Accordingly, the government swiftly announced a review into child poverty and met with relevant third sector representatives, all of whom have been calling for the cap to be removed.

It is, perhaps, an early sign of something that is likely to have a significant impact on parts of the government's legislative agenda. Namely that Labour may have a large majority, but that means a greater number of its MPs feel more comfortable challenging their leadership when they don't agree on policy.

A summary of the key forthcoming legislation announced follows.



Financial services, business and skills

Skills England Bill

A Bill to transfer functions from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) to a new body - Skills England. Skills England will work alongside the Migration Advisory Committee, unions and the Industrial Strategy Council to build and maintain an assessment of current and future skills needs.

The government will also reform the apprenticeship levy, which will be replaced by the Growth and Skills Levy. Skills England will identify the training for which the Growth and Skills Levy will be accessible.

Skills England will ensure national and regional skills systems are aligned to meet skills needs, using local and regional vacancy data to provide their evidence base. It will also take on several of the functions the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill

This Bill will give the Bank of England greater flexibility to respond to the failure of small banks. This is to ensure that where failing banking institutions require intervention, certain costs of managing their failure do not fall on the taxpayer.

The Bill is designed to enable a more effective response to small bank failures, where resolution is judged to be in the public interest by expanding the statutory function of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS), allowing the FSCS to recover the funds provided by charging levies on the banking sector and giving the Bank of England the ability to require a bank in resolution to issue new shares.

Draft Audit Reform and Corporate Governance Bill

The draft Bill will replace the Financial Reporting Council with the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority. The new body will be given powers to uphold standards, independent scrutiny of companies' accounts and accountability for company directors.

The Bill will extend Public Interest Entity (PIE) status to the largest private companies, remove unnecessary rules on smaller PIEs, give powers to investigate and sanction company directors for serious failures in relation to their financial reporting and audit responsibilities and develop a regime to oversee the audit market.

Pension Schemes Bill

The Pension Schemes Bill will include measures that will prevent people from losing track of their pension pots through the consolidation of Defined Contribution individual deferred small pension pots, enabling an individual's deferred small pots to be automatically brought together in one place.

It will also ensure members are saving into pension schemes delivering value through the Value for Money framework. It will require pension schemes to offer retirement products and place duties on trustees of occupational pension schemes to offer a retirement income solution or range of solutions to their members.

The Bill will consolidate the Defined Benefit market through commercial Superfunds, strengthen the Pensions Ombudsman by removing the need for pension schemes to apply to the courts to enforce Ombudsman decisions in relation to the recovery of overpayments and amend the Special Rules for End of Life by extending the definition of 'terminal illness.'

Workers' rights and equalities

Employment Rights Bill

This flagship Bill enshrines the measures set out in Labour's New Deal for Working People. This includes measures such as banning 'exploitative' zero hours contracts to provide workers with contracts reflective of hours worked; banning the practice of Fire and Rehire; introducing day one rights such as parental leave, sick pay and protection from unfair dismissal; and making flexible working the default for all workers from day one, where reasonable.

The Bill also includes significant measures such as creating a new single enforcement body the Fair Work Agency - to enforce these rights. It also proposes establishing a Fair Pay Agreement in the adult social care sector and updating trade union legislation to remove what the government describes as 'unnecessary restrictions on trade union activity.'

Representing a major part of the government's domestic agenda, the Bill is expected to be introduced within the first one hundred days of the new Parliament, though the government has committed to consulting business on the implementation of key proposals.

Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill

The Draft Equality Bill aims to deliver on the government's manifesto commitment to enshrine in statute the right to equal pay for ethnic minorities and disabled people, while introducing reporting on both.

The Bill is expected to apply across the entirety of Great Britain, mirroring the measures in the Equality Act 2010 relating to equal pay and gender reporting.

Housing and planning

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is the major legislative vehicle through which the government will seek to implement its planning reforms.

The aims of the Bill are to "make improvements to the planning system at a local level, modernising planning committees and increasing local planning authorities' capacity to deliver an improved service."

Specific measures included in the Bill include: "simplifying" the consenting process for major infrastructure projects and enable new National Policy Statements to come forward, providing the opportunity for them to be updated every five years; reforming compulsory purchase compensation rules; "modernising" planning committees; increasing the capacity of local planning authorities; and "using development to fund nature recovery where both are stalled".

With planning central to much of the government's economic agenda, expect to see movement on this Bill as a matter of priority.

Renters' Rights Bill

The Renters' Rights Bill will deliver on the government's objective to reinforce standards for the private rented sector, with notable measures including the abolition of Section 21 'no fault' evictions. The Bill also aims to end practices such as rental bidding wars led by landlords and letting agents, while also giving tenants the right to request pets.

On standards, the Bill will apply a Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector for the first time, while Awaab's Law will be applied to the sector to provide clear timeframes within which landlords must make homes safe where they contain "serious hazards."

The Bill will also see the creation of a new digital private rented sector database to bring together information for landlords, tenants and councils, while there will also be a new ombudsman service for the sector to support faster dispute resolutions.

Draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill

A draft Bill to implement the provisions of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024. The government says the Bill will further reform the leasehold system, and bring what it calls the “feudal” system to an end.

Specific measures in the Bill are expected to include enacting the remaining Law Commission recommendations to enhance leaseholders’ rights to extend their lease and buy their freehold; modernising the legal framework for commonhold, including restricting the sale of new leasehold flats; regulating ground rents for existing leaseholders; and ending so-called “fleecehold” arrangements through implementing new protections for homeowners on private estates.



Transport and Infrastructure

Railways Bill

A Railways Bill will establish Great British Railways (GBR) as a single public body which will act as a ‘directing mind’ for the industry. Its responsibilities will include oversight of day-to-day operations and improving passenger experience. GBR will be led by industry professionals and have operational independence.

The Bill creates an independent industry watchdog - the Passengers Standards Authority - to monitor standards with a focus on improving services. Other measures include reforms to the ticketing system, support for freight operators and to provide open access.

Better Buses Bill

This Bill will enable franchise agreements to be agreed at a faster rate, remove the ban on public ownership and the limit on franchising powers to metro mayors. It will also give local authorities oversight over bus system planning and funding.

High Speed Rail (Crewe to Manchester) Bill

This Bill does not reverse the decision to cancel the second Phase of HS2. Instead, the government is repurposing the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill to provide powers to construct and operate rail projects which improve east to west connectivity across the north of England.

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Revenue Support Mechanism) Bill

This Bill is designed to support sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production in the UK by providing revenue certainty to encourage investment in the construction of SAF plants across the UK.

SAF is seen as an essential means of decarbonising air travel, with the government also citing estimates that it could support more than 10,000 jobs in the UK, contributing £1.8 billion to the economy.

Devolution

English Devolution Bill

The English Devolution Bill will give new powers to local areas and create a statutory requirement for the creation of Local Growth Plans. The new powers include “strategic planning, local transport networks, skills, and employment support.” The Bill deepens current devolution settlements and will make it easier to widen them to more local authorities.

Other measures include a more streamlined process for the creation of new Combined and Combined County Authorities. The Bill removes the need for negotiation of devolved powers by making devolution the default setting and allowing local leaders to request additional powers from a defined framework. It also provides a ‘right to buy’ for community assets and improved governance arrangements for local authorities.

Northern Ireland Legacy Legislation

Northern Ireland Legacy Legislation will repeal and replace the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

It will begin by repealing the conditional immunity scheme while ensuring it is compatible with the UK’s obligations to the ECHR and reversing the policy prohibiting civil claims. The government views this as a first step in a further package of measures to address the legacy of the Troubles.

Energy and Environment

Great British Energy Bill

This Bill will see the creation of a new publicly owned energy company, GB Energy, based in Scotland. The Bill is intended to help the government meet its goal of establishing a UK electricity system fully based on clean power by 2030, achieve energy independence and provide lower bills for consumers.

GB Energy will develop, own and operate assets, investing alongside the private sector in renewable energy projects. It will also contribute to the production, distribution, storage and supply of clean energy. GB Energy will be backed with £8.3 billion over this parliament.

National Wealth Fund Bill

The National Wealth Fund will be capitalised with £7.3 billion to make investments across the country, supporting the government’s industrial strategy and clean energy superpower missions. The UK Infrastructure Bank and British Business Bank will be aligned under the National Wealth Fund, which will aim to deliver on the government’s mission to deliver growth and a greener economy.

Labour said in its manifesto that the National Wealth Fund would “have a remit to support Labour’s growth and clean energy missions, making transformative investments across every part of the country.”

The fund will aim to start investments immediately and is targeting to attract £3 of private investment for every £1 it invests.

Water (Special Measures) Bill

The Water (Special Measures) Bill will strengthen the powers of water regulators to put water companies under special measures.

Measures in the Bill will allow regulators to ensure water bosses face personal criminal liability, ban the payment of bonuses if environmental standards are not met, introduce a new ‘code of conduct’ for water companies, and require water companies to install real-time monitors at every sewage outlet.

Further legislation will be introduced for the water industry to improve health measures in rivers, lakes and seas across the country.

Constitution and governance

Budget Responsibility Bill

The Bill will introduce a ‘fiscal lock’ aimed to ensure any government making significant and permanent tax and spending changes will be subject to an independent assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), giving them the power to produce an assessment at a time of its choosing.

House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill

This is a short and narrowly focussed Bill that delivers the government’s manifesto commitment to “bring about modernisation” by removing the right of the remaining hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. This will be the first step in promised wider reform to the Lords.

Hillsborough Law

This Bill is focused on improving transparency and accountability where failure in the provision and delivery of public services is the subject of public investigation and scrutiny. The aims of the Bill are reducing the culture of defensiveness in the public sector and helping ensure that the lack of candour uncovered in recent reports is not repeated, such as in the case of the Hillsborough and Infected Blood Inquiries.

Digital Information and Smart Data Bill

The Digital Information and Smart Data Bill will support innovative uses of data to be safely developed and aims to make public services work better by reforming data sharing and standards.

The Bill will establish Digital Verification Services through measures that support the creation and adoption of secure and trusted digital identity products and services, develop a National Underground Asset Register, set up Smart Data schemes.

It will also make changes to the Digital Economy Act to help the government share data about businesses that use public services. The ICO will be strengthened through the Bill with a new regulatory structure and given new, stronger powers.

Crime, policing and national security

Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

The Bill is intended to support the government’s priority of secure and stronger borders and a “properly controlled and managed” asylum system by launching a Border Security Command to tackle the issue of people smuggling gangs who exploit migrants and fuel the small boats crisis, and introducing measures to attempt to clear the asylum backlog to end hotel use and increase returns.

This will involve introducing stronger powers for law enforcement officers to investigate involvement in organised immigration crime (OIC), for example in stopping and searching at the border. The Bill will also put stronger penalties in place against a range of OIC and border criminality.

Crime and Policing Bill

This Bill will include measures to bring forward arrangements to increase neighbourhood police and Police Community Support Officers patrols in local communities; expand the powers of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to intervene in failing police forces; introduce higher mandatory national vetting standards across policing; and establish new mandatory arrangements to deliver efficiency savings through nationwide standards for procurement, shared services and specialist functions.

The Bill will also introduce new Respect Orders to tackle persistent adult offenders and create a duty for local partners to co-operate to tackle anti-social behaviour, with an anti-social behaviour lead in every local authority area. It will create a new specific offence of assaulting a shopworker and introduce stronger measures to tackle low level shoplifting. It will introduce new bans on ninja swords and other lethal blades, to tackle knife crime.

It is also intended to provide a specialist, enhanced response to violence against women and girls.

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill

Known as Martyn’s law after Martyn Hett, one of the victims of the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, this Bill requires those responsible for certain premises and events to take steps to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack. The measures required vary according to the capacity of the premises or event. Smaller premises will be required to notify the regulator of their premises and put in place reasonably practicable procedural measures to keep the public safe.

Some measures could be as simple as educating staff on locking doors and evacuation procedures. The requirements for organisations at these smaller premises will be focused on simple, low-cost activities surrounding policies and procedures.

Those responsible for larger premises and certain public events will be required to put in place counter terrorism measures that could be expected to reduce both the risk of an attack occurring at the premises as well as the risk of physical harm in the event an attack was to occur.

Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill

This Bill will include measures to strengthen powers for the Victims' Commissioner to ensure that they are empowered to hold the system to account for the needs of victims not being met.; require offenders to attend their sentencing hearings so that victims and bereaved family members of deceased victims see criminals face the consequences of their actions; restrict parental responsibility for child sex offenders and implement restrictions on sex offenders changing their names; and reduce delays in the courts system by allowing Associate Prosecutors to work on appropriate cases.

Armed Forces Commissioner Bill

This Bill will introduce a new Armed Forces Commissioner to act as an independent champion for service personnel and their families.

Cyber Security and Resilience Bill

The Bill is intended to strengthen UK defences and ensure that more essential digital services are protected, by expanding the remit of the existing regulation, putting regulators on a stronger footing, and increasing reporting requirements to build a better picture in government of cyber threats.



Health, wellbeing and culture

Football Governance Bill

A Bill to establish an independent football regulator in England. The new regulator will be tasked with operating a club licensing system and ensuring the financial resilience of individual football clubs and the wider industry by, among other powers, regulating the cash flow between football leagues.

Other essential provisions include a minimum fan engagement requirement in decisions like changing the club's colours, a ban on clubs joining unlicensed leagues, and establishing a 'Football Club Corporate Governance Code.'

Tobacco and Vapes Bill

This Bill will enact a generational smoking ban by progressively raising the legal age for buying tobacco products. This would effectively ban those born during or after 2009 from ever being sold cigarettes, vapes, and other nicotine-based products.

The Bill supports the government's manifesto promise to improve healthy life expectancy and tackle smoking as the leading preventable cause of death. It reintroduces the measures proposed by the previous government, which did not reach the statute book before the general election.

Mental Health Act

This Bill will modernise the Mental Health Act to improve mental health outcomes and tackle rising suicide rates by increasing patient autonomy and rights. The main provisions include the revision of detention and treatment criteria to ensure patients are not unnecessarily detained, the removal of police stations as places of safety for those facing a mental health crisis, and increased access for offenders with mental health needs to necessary support.

In addition, the government has also committed to reducing post-referral waiting times and focusing on prevention to ultimately give mental health the same level of attention as physical health.

The Children's Wellbeing Bill

This Bill will seek to deliver on the government's manifesto commitments to raise education standards, equalise opportunity, and ensure children's wellbeing.

The main provisions include requiring all schools to teach the national curriculum, free breakfast clubs in every primary school, limiting the number of branded items of uniforms and PE kits required of parents to bring down costs and increase accessibility, and creating a duty for local authorities to maintain Children Not in School registers. It also includes changes to the legislation on investigating teacher misconduct and inspecting independent schools.

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If you have any questions or would like to discuss how the measures announced in the King's Speech affect your organisation, please contact: publicaffairs@secnewgate.co.uk

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