

LGA On the day briefing - Queen's Speech

25th May 2010

Introduction

This briefing covers only the legislation outlined today in the Queen's Speech. Other measures not requiring legislation (for example, banning the use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act by councils unless they are signed off by a magistrate) may still be put into place and the LGA Group will be lobbying on these separately. The coalition Government's full proposals are outlined in an LGA briefing [here](#)

Framed within the priorities of "freedom, fairness and responsibility", the Government today outlined its legislative priorities for the new session of Parliament in the Queen's Speech. The Government's main priorities remain to reduce the deficit and restore economic growth.

22 Bills will be introduced in this first session of the new coalition Government which will run until the next Queen's Speech in November 2011. The LGA Group will be focusing its lobbying work on those Bills which are priorities for member councils.

LGA key messages

We strongly welcome the Government's intention to devolve power and autonomy to councils and to local people. Ultimately this means giving freedoms and flexibilities to decide things locally.

Local government is ready to work with the new coalition government to reduce spending and reform the state. Councils are ready to strike a deal with central government which will see local government take full responsibility for delivering more with less.

The LGA can offer:

- Specific measures to make efficiency savings and cut waste quickly without affecting the front line
- Radical decentralisation for a more effective and affordable state
- Comprehensive support to councils to ensure success

The LGA Group will be working with Ministers, government departments and members of both Houses to ensure that the best interests of councils are represented as the legislation passes through Parliament.

Key bills for local government

The following Bills will be introduced after summer recess

Decentralisation and Localism Bill

Will devolve greater powers to councils and local communities, specifically to give communities much more control over housing and planning decisions.

Specific measures on **Localism** include:

- Give councils a power of general competence.

- Give local government and community groups greater financial autonomy.
- Abolish the Standards Board regime and abolish Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).
- Give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases.
- Require public bodies to publish online job titles of every member of staff and salaries and expenses of senior officials.
- Give councillors the power to vote on large salary packages for unelected council officials.
- Create Local Enterprise Partnerships (replacing Regional Development Agencies) to promote economic development.

LGA Group view:

- We agree that a general power of competence is crucial to support councils and have published a draft Bill setting out how this could be enacted [here](#). Greater financial autonomy will allow councils to respond to local priorities.
- We welcome the commitment to cut local government inspection – including CAA. Excessive inspection has outlived its purpose and costs too much money.
- Councils already have a duty to respond to petitions and will continue to seek to find innovative mechanisms to engage with their communities.
- The LGA Group has recommended that councils should be able to establish remuneration committees, to include members from outside the council, which can oversee and scrutinise pay packages.

Specific measures on **Planning** include:

- Abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies and the Infrastructure Planning Commission.
- Return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils.

LGA Group view:

- We look forward to further discussions on the detail of how this will work in practice.
- The LGA has long been arguing for a simpler and more joined up approach to planning decisions and big infrastructure projects that are genuinely national in their impact.
- We believe it is important that the consolidated national framework be based on an understanding of the needs of and impact on local economies and strictly limited to national projects.
- It is important that any end to regional targets be accompanied by powers for councils to coordinate funding and strategically plan collectively at the sub-regional level.

Specific measures on **Housing**:

- Phase out the ring-fencing of grants to local government and review the unfair Housing Revenue Account.

LGA Group view:

- The LGA agrees that the Housing Revenue Account is unfair and has long been campaigning for a reform of council housing finance.
- There is a strong consensus within local government that reform must now move forward speedily.

Education and Children's Bill

Will allow different groups, including parents, to start and run state schools, and establish the "pupil premium" which would see more money being spent on children from a disadvantaged background.

Specific measures include:

- New providers can enter the state school system in response to parental demand.
- To reform Ofsted and other accountability frameworks to ensure that head teachers are held properly accountable for the core educational goals of attainment and closing the gap between rich and poor.
- Introduction of the pupil premium.

LGA Group view:

- The LGA supports the expansion of more providers in the market to enable the expansion of education and training choices available to local parents and learners.
- We believe that local authorities offer a better way of managing this expansion than a central government department or a non departmental public body.
- Councils can provide the mechanism for ensuring that schools admission and exclusion policies are fair, and fairly operated, and deliver a place for all local children and young people, including those with special educational needs.
- Councils are uniquely placed to provide this local commissioning role allowing for the provision of individual education services to be delivered in connection with other local public services provided by councils, especially child protection.
- LGA agrees with the introduction of a 'pupil premium'.
- It is unclear as yet how head teachers alone can be 'held properly accountable' for attainment and 'closing the gap between rich and poor'. We would expect other local partners, including the local authority, to assist schools in ensuring this can happen, as not all support work is commissioned by or occurs wholly within the school context, for example health and social care issues.

Other Bills affecting local government

The following Bills will be introduced immediately

Academies Bill

The Bill will allow more schools to become academies, as well as giving more say to teachers to decide what should be in the curriculum.

LGA Group view:

- Local authorities have been pro-active in helping to ensure a greater diversity in school choices for local parents over a number of years, including in many instances co-sponsoring Academies. The LGA agrees that there should be an expansion of education and training choices available to local parents and learners.
- The process for creating more Academies appears to be more centralised with local authorities no longer needing to be consulted and any change being agreed only by the Secretary of State. We look forward to further discussion on the detail of how local accountability could be maintained, in line with the Government's expressed commitment to decentralisation.

Local Government (Revocation of Structural Change) Bill

This will stop the planned creation of single-tier councils serving Exeter and Norwich.

The following Bills will be introduced before summer recess

The Freedom Bill

This will include the scrapping of universal DNA databases and the placing of restrictions on internet records, while the use of CCTV cameras will be reviewed.

LGA Group view:

- The regulations around council use of CCTV are not always clear. We would be pleased to see further clarity provided on the use of CCTV.
- Any new arrangements must recognise that in some cases surveillance is a vital tool to help councils tackle crimes which impact on local communities – for example, illegal money lending, sales of alcohol and cigarettes to children and anti-social behavior.
- We hope that the Government will address concerns previously raised about giving councils the same rights of audience in civil courts as they have in magistrates' courts.

National Insurance Contributions Bill

Will stop the planned rise in National Insurance Contributions (NIC) for employers. The rise in NICs for employees will still go ahead.

The following Bills will be introduced after summer recess

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill

Will seek to make police forces more accountable and crack down on anti-social behaviour and alcohol-related violence.

Specific measures include:

- Introduce measures to make the police more accountable through oversight by a directly elected individual.
- Overhaul Licensing Act to give local authorities stronger powers.
- Allow councils to shut down any shop or bar found to be persistently selling alcohol to children.
- Ban the sale of alcohol below cost price.
- Permit local councils to charge more for late-night licenses.

LGA Group view:

- With any reform of the police structure it is vital that local partnerships are not fractured, especially during a time when we need local services to come together to pool resources and deliver efficient and effective frontline services. We will be discussing with our members how best to respond to these proposals.
- We welcome measures to increase powers for councils to remove licenses from problem premises, and to shut down shops known to be selling alcohol to children.
- The LGA Group has been calling for councils to have the power to charge more for late night licenses on the "polluter pays" principle and welcomes this measure.
- Councils would welcome the power to set locally the floor price for the sale of alcohol in conjunction with the police and local partners.

- However we would like assurances that any additional revenue from increased licence costs would not be ring fenced for providing extra policing. Late night licences also affect other services, such as street cleaning, and it is important that these can also be funded through licensing revenues.

Welfare Reform Bill

To simplify the benefits system in order to improve work incentives, including establishing a single welfare-to-work regime and increasing sanctions on those who refuse.

LGA Group view:

- Councils should be given a bigger role in commissioning solutions to unemployment so that services can be supported by and/or integrated with other public services, thereby better helping people into work. This is consistent with the new Work Programme. Councils can help manage some of the risks, including how to get best value for money from the payment levels for job outcomes and making sure other public services work well with private providers.
- Local government has a strong track record on helping the long-term unemployed back to work. Our major Hidden Talents project last year demonstrated how better and more cost-effective outcomes for young people can be achieved through better local working to tailor support for 16 to 25 year olds.

Energy Security and Green Economy Bill

Will seek to implement the "Green deal" which will improve energy efficiency in homes and businesses and promote low carbon energy production. Energy supplies will also be "secured".

LGA Group view:

- We believe that councils are in a position to take a strong leadership role on making homes energy efficient, and on ensuring as much required heat and energy as possible are generated locally and through renewable means.
- Councils should be allowed to take responsibility for achieving real change for their residents, with needless bureaucracy and interventions from central government and quangos cut.

Public Bodies Bill

Will seek to ensure greater accountability, transparency and efficiency in Government by reducing the number and costs of quangos. Will also provide Ministers with the powers to abolish, merge or transfer functions.

LGA Group view:

- Through our Who's in charge? Campaign, the LGA Group has consistently called for a reduction in the number of quangos and is pleased to see the Government addressing this.

Health Bill

Will seek to give health professionals and patients more say over NHS decision-making. Will cut health service quangos and some central targets and increase focus on "health inequalities"

LGA Group view:

- It will be important not to put at risk the real gains achieved from partnership working between local authorities and the NHS by introducing split mandates through directly elected individuals on Primary Care Trust (PCT)

Boards. We support a strengthening of local government working with PCTs to improve public health.

- We are pleased that there will be clarity on the role of Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Monitor. As far as CQC is concerned, we believe there should be a continuing focus on the experience of patients and service users of the interplay of health and care and support services.

Pensions and Savings Bill

Will restore the earnings link for the basic state pension – with a guarantee that pensions are raised by at least 2.5 per cent a year.

Other Bills

The following Bills will be introduced immediately

- **Identity Documents Bill** – *To scrap identity cards.*

The following Bills will be introduced before summer recess

- **Parliamentary Reform Bill** – *To introduce five-year fixed-term parliaments, reducing the number of MPs, and reform the House of Lords.*
- **Office of Budget Responsibility Bill** – *Sets up the independent OBR which will replace the Treasury as the official "forecaster" for growth and borrowing.*
- **Equitable Life Payments Scheme Bill** - *Offer compensation to those who lost out when Equitable Life came close to collapse.*

The following Bills will be introduced after summer recess

- **European Communities (Amendment) Referendum Lock Bill** – *To enshrine the commitment to hold a referendum if there are any more attempts by the EU to grab significant powers from Britain under the Lisbon Treaty or in any other way.*
 - **Scotland Bill** - *Implement the recommendations of the Calman Commission.*
 - **Armed Forces Bill** – *To rebuild the Military Covenant.*
 - **Financial Services Regulation Bill** – *To put regulation back in the hands of the Bank of England and crack down on bonuses.*
 - **Terrorist Asset Freezing Bill** - *Will expand the definition of an organisation classed as terrorist.*
 - **Postal Services Bill** – *To modernise the Royal Mail*
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Other expected legislation

- **Overseas development aid** – *To commit via a Parliamentary motion to spend 0.7 per cent of national income on development aid by 2013.*
- **Airport Economic Regulation Bill** – *To break-up BAA's monopoly*
- **Cap on non-EU economic migrants**
- **Draft Bill on Reform of Parliamentary Privilege**
- **Broadband Infrastructure** - *To support investment in new high-speed broadband internet connections.*
- **High speed railway network** – *To enable the already announced route between London and Birmingham to be constructed.*