

The Queen's Speech 2017 – The Implications for Housing and Local Government

Briefing Paper

June 2017



The Houses of Parliament where the Queen's Speech was delivered on 21st June 2017.

Introduction

Following the General Election of 8th June 2017, the minority Conservative government presented its Queen's Speech to Parliament on 21st June 2017. It had been expected that not all the proposals that had been included in the Conservatives' manifesto would be included in the Queen's Speech due to the government's lack of a majority and divisions within the Conservative Party.

The Conservatives are in the process of negotiating a 'deal' with the Democratic Unionist Party that would cover 'confidence and supply'. This 'deal' would stop short of a formal coalition but would involve the Democratic Unionists agreeing to support the Conservative government on the Queen's speech, budget, votes of confidence and other key matters in exchange for the certain policy concessions.

The negotiations between the Conservatives and the Democratic Unionist Party are taking longer than originally anticipated. Despite the Queen's speech being delayed because of this, agreement had still not been reached by 21st June 2017.

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It has been reported that the Democratic Unionist Party do not wish to be 'taken for granted' by the Conservatives and that their requests are focused on providing additional funding to Northern Ireland – including £1billion for the National Health Service and £1billion for infrastructure. However, it is expected that the Democratic Unionists will still support the Conservatives in the vote on the Queen's speech.

In the circumstances, it was expected that the Queen's speech would not include any of the more controversial proposals that were included in the Conservative manifesto or were raised during the campaign by the Prime Minister. Tim Bale, Professor of Politics at Queen Mary University of London, told the BBC that the Queen's Speech will inevitably:

"Scrap anything that looks like it won't get absolute support".

This was proved to be the case.

This Queen's speech is unusual for several reasons: It was delayed because of the political situation and, as the Queen's speech of 2018 has been cancelled, it covers two years. It also dispensed with some of the usual ceremonials because of having been re-scheduled. It includes proposals for 27 bills but is generally regarded as being rather 'light'. While most Queen's speeches are remarkable for what they include this one is generally regarded as being remarkable for what it does not include.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to summarise the Queen's speech and the reaction to it, and to provide some commentary, with specific reference to its implications for housing and local government.

Housing Policy

The only reference to housing in the Queen's speech is that:

"Proposals will be brought forward to ban unfair tenant fees, promote fairness and transparency in the housing market, and help ensure more homes are built."

And in the foreword to the background notes that the government published to accompany the Queen's speech, Theresa May, the Prime-Minister, added only that:

"We will continue to increase housebuilding through measures set out in our Housing White Paper."

New Affordable Homes

During the election campaign, Theresa May expressed a wish to 'fix the broken housing market' and arrest the decline in affordable housing through a scheme designed to boost the number of new council homes for rent. She announced a plan to offer funds, loans and new powers to councils and housing associations to help them to build a new generation of affordable housing for renters. She also pledged to give the new tenants the option to buy the property after ten to fifteen years.

The plan was that the government would conclude 'deals' with local authorities and housing associations. The homes would be let at affordable rents for a fixed term of ten to fifteen years after which a proportion of the affordable housing would have to be sold. The tenant would receive the first offer to buy. Councils would need to demonstrate affordable housing need and the deals would include checks on the quality of the homes built. Increases in land value would be invested in more affordable housing.

It was anticipated that local authorities and housing associations would be offered more flexibility around rent setting as part of the deals and that local authorities would be given higher 'borrowing caps' enabling them to borrow money to fund the building of new social homes.

The Queen's speech included a reference to ensuring that more homes are built while the Prime-Minister's foreword to the explanatory note refers to the policies in the Housing White Paper rather than those in the Conservative manifesto. Some commentators suggest that the proposal that government should enter into 'deals' with housing associations and local authorities to deliver new affordable housing has now been abandoned. It is certainly not included in the Queen's speech.

Supported Housing

The manifesto does not say anything specific about the government's proposals for the future funding of supported housing. There is a reference to:

"Supporting specialist housing where it is needed, like multigenerational homes and housing for older people, including by helping housing associations increase their specialist housing stock."

However, this does not say how the Conservatives would take forward their proposals for the future funding of supported housing. These were set out in a statement in September 2016 and a consultation paper in November 2016, but this approach was recently criticised by a Parliamentary Select Committee.

The Queen's speech made no reference to the future funding of supported housing. There is currently a crisis in supported housing that has been created by the government's partially implemented proposals for change to the funding regime. In view of this the absence of any reference to supported housing in the Queen's speech is disappointing.

Right to Buy and Sale of High Value Council Homes

The manifesto makes no specific mention of extending the 'right to buy' to housing association tenants or of the proposal to fund this through the sale of high value council homes that was included in the Housing & Planning Act 2016 but has yet to be enacted. However, the manifesto does say that the Conservatives would 'continue to support those struggling to buy or rent a home, including those living in a home owned by a housing association'. This could be taken to mean continued support for the extension of the 'right to buy' to housing association tenants but some commentators have concluded that the Conservatives have now abandoned the policy of selling high value council homes. In a recent interview with 'Inside Housing', Gavin Barwell MP, then Minister for Housing and now Chief of Staff at Downing Street, justified the policy by reference to the 2015 manifesto pledge.

The Queen's speech made no reference to the extension of the 'right to buy' to housing association tenants or to the sale of high value council homes. It appears to be generally assumed that the 'right to buy' will be gradually rolled out to housing association tenants and that the sale of high value council homes has been abandoned.

Housing Legislation

The Queen's speech offered some housing legislation as follows:

Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to transform the approach to domestic violence and abuse to ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward and report their experiences, safe in the knowledge that the state and justice system will do everything it can to both support them and their children, and pursue their abuser.

Domestic abuse is generally recognised as a serious problem. The 2015/16 Crime Survey for England and Wales indicates that 7.7% of women and 4.4% of men reported having experienced any type of domestic abuse in the last year. Data from 2015/16 shows that 11% of all offences recorded by the police were flagged as domestic abuse related.

The government states that the volume of prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse are at the highest ever recorded. In 2015/16 prosecutions reached 100,930 and convictions 75,235. Around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse. Those who witnessed domestic abuse as a child were more likely to experience domestic abuse as an adult.

The main benefits of the Bill are intended to be to:

- Protect victims of domestic violence and abuse.
- Give the justice system greater guidance and clarity about the devastating impact of domestic violence and abuse on families.

The main elements of the Bill are to:

- Establish a Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner, to stand up for victims and survivors, raise public awareness, monitor the response of statutory agencies and local authorities and hold the justice system to account in tackling domestic abuse.
- Define domestic abuse in law to underpin all other measures in the Bill.
- Create a consolidated new domestic abuse civil prevention and protection order regime.
- Ensure that if abusive behaviour involves a child, then the court can hand down a sentence that reflects the devastating life-long impact that abuse can have on the child.

The Bill's substantive provisions would apply to England and Wales only. The functions of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner in relation to Wales are to be determined in consultation with the Welsh Government.

Tenant's Fees Bill

The Queen's speech proposes a Tenant's Fees Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to ban charging tenants 'letting fees' to improve transparency, affordability and competition in the private rental market.

The English Housing Survey 2014/15 found that the average letting fees charged per tenancy is £223 and that median fees charged by agents increased by 60% between 2009/10 and 2014/15 (14% increase in mean). Shelter found that 1 in 7 tenants pay more than £500. The Citizens' Advice Bureau found that 64% of tenants experienced problems paying letting agents' fees and 42% had to borrow money.

An eight-week consultation on banning letting fees paid by tenants closed on 2nd June. Responses will be used to inform the draft Bill, and the Government will respond fully in due course.

The main benefits of the Bill are intended to be:

- To increase competition in the private rental sector, resulting in lower costs overall and a higher quality of service for renters.
- Reduced upfront costs for tenants.
- To deliver on the Conservatives' manifesto commitment to 'shortly ban letting agent fees' and make renting fairer and more affordable for millions of tenants. Banning letting agent fees will improve transparency for renters – currently, these fees are not explained clearly, meaning tenants are charged very different, and sometimes very high, fees for similar services.

The main elements of the Bill are:

- Measures to ban landlords and agents from requiring tenants to pay letting fees as a condition of their tenancy.
- Measures to enforce the ban with provision for tenants to be able to recover unlawfully charged fees.

The ban would apply to England only. However, some minor amendments to the Consumer Rights Act 2015 may apply to England and Wales.

Goods Mortgages Bill

The Queen's speech proposed a Good Mortgages Bill that will:

- Repeal the Victorian-era Bills of Sale Acts and replaces them with a Good Mortgages Act that enables individuals to use their existing goods (such as a vehicle) as security for a loan, while retaining possession of the goods.
- Increase protection for borrowers who get into financial difficulties, by introducing a new requirement for a lender to obtain a court order before seizing goods where a borrower has made significant repayments.
- Help borrowers in financial difficulties by giving borrowers the right to voluntary termination by handing over their vehicle or other goods to the lender.
- Provide protection for innocent third parties who buy a vehicle subject to a logbook loan that may be at risk of repossession, and makes clearer that borrowers who knowingly sell goods with a logbook loan attached could be committing fraud.

Grenfell Tower Fire

On 14th June 2017, a fire occurred in Grenfell Tower, a block of high-rise flats owned by Kensington & Chelsea Borough Council and managed by the Kensington & Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation. It resulted in many fatalities and in all the surviving residents becoming homeless. It is clearly important to establish why the fire occurred and what needs to be done to prevent such a fire occurring again.

The Queen's speech stated that:

“My Government will initiate a full public inquiry into the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower to ascertain the causes and ensure that the appropriate lessons are learnt.”

On 15th June 2017, the Prime Minister announced a full public inquiry would take place to look into the circumstances behind the tragic fire which broke out in Grenfell Tower in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. In the background notes that the government published to accompany the Queen's speech the following information was provided about the enquiry:

- This will be a full public inquiry, in line with the Inquiries Act.

- The Government will appoint a judge to Chair the inquiry on the recommendation of the Lord Chief Justice.
- Residents, the families of the deceased, the Mayor of London and HM Opposition will be consulted on the terms of reference under which the inquiry proceed and the Government will agree the terms of reference, which will be published in consultation with the Chair of the Inquiry.
- The voices of residents and victims' families must be heard by the inquiry and we will provide funding for their legal representation to make sure this happens.
- The Chair will determine who to call to give evidence (on oath) and the call for papers. The Government will cooperate fully.
- The Inquiry's report will be published to the Prime Minister and Parliament.
- Interim findings will provide a basis for early action.
- The Government has made a £5 million Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund available. Every household whose home has been destroyed as a result of the fire is receiving a minimum £5,500 payment from the fund. We will also ensure that until people are rehoused, the cost of temporary accommodation will be met on their behalf.
- People who lost their homes in the fire must be rehoused at the earliest possible opportunity and we will aim to do this within 3 weeks of the date of the disaster.
- We guarantee that we will rehouse people as close as practically possible to where they previously lived, meaning they can continue to access the same public services such as their local school or local GP. This rehousing would be in the same borough and, if not, a neighbouring borough.
- On 15th June, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced the activation of the Bellwin scheme to help the council support the community. Under the scheme, financial assistance is available to local authorities to help with immediate costs following a disaster or emergency in their area that involves danger to life or property. They can apply to have 100% of their eligible costs above a threshold reimbursed.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government is urgently conducting an audit of all high rises in England by local authority. Fire and Rescue services will follow up the inspection of any buildings identified as high risk and action will be taken to safeguard residents where required.
- We will be assessing the position on Building Regulations, recognising the need to take account of public inquiry interim findings and conclusions.
- We will also develop a new strategy for resilience in major disasters – which could include a new Civil Disaster Reaction Taskforce that will help at times of emergency

Local Government

The Queen's speech made no specific reference to local government but it did refer to adult social care and education as outlined below.

Rob Whiteman, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy told 'Public Finance' that:

“Several pressing issues that were conspicuous in their absence... Without urgent action, both health and social care budgets will be stretched to breaking point. More realistic medium and long term financial planning, and investment in prevention, is needed to stabilise the financial position of the National Health Service. As the top financial challenge for local government and given that it was such high priority by the Government but a few weeks ago, silence on the issue of social care today is extremely concerning... The election of English city mayors is a significant step towards that devolution, but leaving out all mention of local government from the Queen's speech raises concerns that certain initiatives, such as the local retention of business rates agenda, have already been kicked into the long grass.”

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And Jonathan Carr-West, Chief Executive of the Local Government Information Unit, told 'Public Finance' that:

"For local government, this is a Queen's speech that hovers around the edges rather than directly confronting the big questions... There are no firm proposals on social care funding reform and no mention of devolution in England. There is no further detail on the road map towards 100% business rate retention. All of these issues are urgent and growing more urgent by the month."

Adult Social Care

The only reference to social care in the Queen's speech is that:

"My ministers will work to improve social care and will bring forward proposals for consultation."

The government elaborated on this in the background notes that they published alongside the Queen's speech as follows:

"We will work to address the challenges of social care for our ageing population, bringing forward proposals for consultation to build widespread support."

"The ageing population presents one of our nation's most profound challenges. It raises critical questions as to how as a society we enable all adults to live well into later life and how we deliver sustainable public services that support them to do so."

"The Government has already invested an additional £2 billion to put social care on a more stable footing and alleviate short-term pressures across the health and care system. However, further reform is required to ensure that the system is prepared to meet the challenges of the increasing numbers of over 75s."

"To address these questions, the Government will work with partners at all levels, including those who use services and who work to provide care, to bring forward proposals for public consultation. The Government will consult on options to encourage a wider debate."

"The consultation will set out options to improve the social care system and to put it on a more secure financial footing, supporting people, families and communities to prepare for old age, and address issues related to the quality of care and variation in practice."

It was not expected that the specific pledges on social care that were included in the Conservatives' manifesto would be included in the Queen's Speech. The plans were for elderly people requiring care in their own homes to meet the cost of it - but they would be allowed to keep £100,000. Theresa May, the Prime Minister, later said that there would also be an absolute limit on the amount people would have to pay. However, the proposals were not popular with the electorate and there were also reports of 'dismay' among Conservative MPs who had not been consulted on the plans.

As expected, the plans have been replaced by a promise to launch a consultation on the future funding of social care. That could include a policy proposal document (White Paper) – or a 'Green Paper' outlining various alternatives.

The number of people aged 75 and over is expected to increase by 70% between 2015 and 2035. At the same time, the proportion of the total population that is represented by older people is expected to increase to 365 per 1,000 working age people by 2037, from 280 in 1971.

There is a threefold variation in the proportion of care providers rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission between the highest and lowest council areas in England

Prior to the Queen's speech, Alison Holt of the BBC wrote that:

"With growing demand, squeezed budgets, fewer people getting council help, a shortage of care staff and care companies handing back local authority contracts, it is safe to say this complicated system is in crisis.

"After putting short-term money into social care last winter, the government was planning a green paper on funding this autumn. The other main parties have also talked about working towards a cross-party consensus.

"Will they deal with the very real problems faced by the social care system head on, or will they veer away from the issue after getting their fingers burned during the election campaign?

"What if the government puts social care into the 'too difficult to deal with right now' tray? Well, that is described by at least one commentator as grim, because these problems won't go away."

During the election campaign, the Conservatives proposed more funding for mental health services, along with 10,000 more mental health nurses in the National Health Service. While there are plans set out in the Queen's Speech for mental health reform, there is no mention of new nurses or any cash commitments - only a pledge to 'invest in new and better services'.

It is to be hoped that the government's proposals for improving social care will be available soon and will offer constructive policy proposals and sufficient resources for adult social care.

Education

The only reference to Education in the Queen's speech is that:

"My government will continue to work to ensure that every child has the opportunity to attend a good school and that all schools are fairly funded. My ministers will work to ensure people have the skills they need for the high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the future, including through a major reform of technical education."

The government elaborated on this in the background notes that they published to accompany the Queen's speech as follows:

"We want every child to go to a good or outstanding school. We will look at all options and work with Parliament to bring forward proposals that can command a majority.

"We want to make sure all children, regardless of where they live or their background, can get a world-class education that unlocks talent and creates opportunity. We want to make Britain the world's Great Meritocracy: a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow, where advantage is based on merit not privilege.

"Thanks to our reforms there are 1.8 million more children in schools rated good or outstanding than in 2010.

"Delivering enough school places is one of the Government's top priorities. We have already committed £5.8 billion for local authorities up to 2020 to deliver new school places, on top of our investment in the free schools programme.

"We will continue to encourage more people, schools and institutions with something to offer to come forward and help deliver more good school places.

"To continue the growth of good or outstanding school places, we have made available to academies and maintained schools a £140million Strategic School Improvement Fund.

"We will continue to convert failing maintained schools into academies so that they can benefit from the support of a strong sponsor, and we are focused on building capacity across the system to enable this, including through growing new multi academy trusts."

Prior to the Queen's speech, Sean Coughlan of the BBC wrote:

"School funding proved to be one of the biggest grassroots issues during the election. And proposed changes to the funding formula, which looked vulnerable before the election, are now likely to be heavily revised, with a higher minimum amount per pupil.

"Apart from how school cash is allocated, head teachers have been loudly telling parents (otherwise known as "voters") that the overall level of funding is much too low.

"If the new government is to avoid even more vociferous protests, they might need much bigger investments. And there must be every chance that the proposed source of extra money - scrapping universal free school lunches for infants - will be ditched as unpopular and requiring legislation that would now be difficult to get past MPs."

During her campaign for the leadership of the Conservative Party and during the general election, Theresa May proposed the reversal of the ban on selective education in England. It featured prominently in the Conservative manifesto that claimed that grammar schools almost completely eliminated the 'attainment gap between rich and poor pupils'.

However, several Conservative MPs have been uneasy about the plans. Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London told the BBC that grammar schools are among the policy areas that will come down to a calculation about simple parliamentary arithmetic.

The Conservative manifesto set out plans to end free school lunches for infant pupils and replace them with free school breakfasts for every child. This was a controversial proposal and was not mentioned in the Queen's speech.

The Queen's speech is seen to be abandoning the proposals for more grammar schools and the ending of free school lunches; and offering a revision of the proposals for the future funding of schools.

Welfare

The Queen's speech made no reference to welfare or benefits.

The government had already committed itself to not introducing any new welfare reforms, although it plans to continue to implement those that have already been agreed.

The Conservative manifesto proposed ending the 'triple lock', in which pensions are raised in line with the highest of average earnings, prices or 2.5%. From 2020, the plan was to end the 2.5% element, to leave a 'double lock'. However, this was a proposal that was not popular with the electorate and with some Conservative MPs.

The Democratic Unionist Party wishes to retain the 'triple lock' but as policy on pensions is devolved to Northern Ireland, it would be possible for the 'triple lock' to continue in Northern Ireland while being abandoned in England, Scotland and Wales.

However, there is a complicated parliamentary procedure to determine whether MPs from non-English seats can vote on matters relating to England.

The Conservative manifesto included plans to means-test winter fuel payments for pensioners in England and Wales. However, the Scottish Conservative Party leader Ruth Davidson has said that Scottish pensioners should continue to get the payments because the country is colder. Neither is the proposal universally popular with Conservative MPs in England and Wales.

The Democratic Unionist Party manifesto says that they are 'proud' of the universal benefits introduced in Northern Ireland, saying it would 'resist any assault' on winter fuel payments there.

The Queen's speech contained no proposal to alter the 'triple lock' or to means-test winter fuel payments for pensioners. These proposals have now been abandoned by the government.

Police

While the Queen's speech mentioned increased powers for the Police, it did not mention any increased funding. However, the previous day it had been announced that the government had abandoned its plans to revise the police funding formula in England in a way that would have redistributed resources from urban to rural areas.

European Union

The Queen's speech focused on legislation that would be required for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, including the so-called 'Repeal Bill'. The bill would repeal the European Communities Act 1972 and end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. It would ensure that all existing European Union legislation would be copied across into domestic United Kingdom law to ensure a smooth transition on the day after Brexit. According to the House of Commons Library it is:

"One of the largest legislative projects ever undertaken in the United Kingdom"

Much European legislation relates to protection for human rights, employees, consumers and the environment.

The bill will also provide for the government to make amendments to former European legislation through regulations rather than through legislation, thus enabling it to by-pass Parliament. There are concerns that this would enable ministers to carry out a 'bonfire of controls' without Parliamentary scrutiny.

The Repeal Bill will be supported by a Customs Bill, Trade Bill, Immigration Bill, Agriculture Bill, Fisheries Bill, Nuclear Safeguards Bill and International Sanctions Bill.

It is interesting that the bill is now referred to as the 'Repeal Bill' rather than as the 'Great Repeal Bill'.

Impact on the Economy

The Queen's Speech stated that:

"My ministers will strengthen the economy so that it supports the creation of jobs and generates the tax revenues needed to invest in the National Health Service, schools and other public services.

My government will continue to improve the public finances, while keeping taxes low. It will spread prosperity and opportunity across the country through a new modern industrial strategy.”

The government elaborated on this in the background notes that were published alongside the Queen’s speech as follows:

“We will reflect on the message voters sent at the General Election – while always remembering that we have to balance the books and eliminate the deficit we inherited following the financial crisis. This is to ensure that future generations do not pay when we fail to live within our means.

“Our Autumn Statement last year set out a balanced plan to keep the public finances under control, while allowing us to invest in the public services on which we all depend like the NHS and schools. We will reflect on this at future fiscal events such as this year’s Autumn Budget.

“The Government values the important work that public sector workers do in delivering essential public services. We can only have well-funded public services and high standards of living if we deliver a stronger economy and increase our productivity.

“We have committed to budget balance – matching what the Government spends with what we raise in taxation – by the middle of the next decade.

“In the interim, the Government will reduce the structural deficit to less than 2% of GDP and get debt falling as a percentage of GDP by 2020/21. In their March forecast, the Office for Budget Responsibility judged that the Government remains on track to meet its interim targets.

“These rules take a balanced approach, combining the flexibility to support the economy if necessary in the near term, and the commitment to return the public finances to a sustainable position in the long term. The Chancellor will set out levels of tax and spending at future fiscal events, but we have been clear that we want to keep taxes as low as possible for ordinary working people.

“This fiscal framework has provided the space for additional investment in the productive capacity of the UK economy through the new National Productivity Investment Fund announced at Autumn Statement 2016. This is targeted at four areas that are critical for productivity: transport, digital communications, research and development and housing. It will provide for an extra £23 billion of investment between 2017/18 and 2021/22.”

This confirms that the government intends to continue to borrow to cover the deficit between its revenues and its expenditure until the mid-2020s.

Writing for the BBC prior to the Queen’s speech, Emma Simpson said that:

“What would really make a big difference to public spending is if the government eases the restrictions on public sector pay increases, currently capped at 1%, or the freeze on working age benefits.

“There’s been much talk about reining back on austerity. The new government could end up borrowing more, not less.”

There are no proposals to ease the restrictions on public sector pay increases or the freeze on working age benefits. However, there is confirmation that the government will pursue a more interventionist industrial strategy, supporting business through subsidies and protectionism. It is also implied that the government will continue to operate the public finances at a deficit.

It is generally expected that the government will increase expenditure in Northern Ireland as part of its 'deal' with the Democratic Unionist Party. Under current public expenditure rules any increase in the devolved budgets for Northern Ireland would have to be accompanied by increases in the devolved budgets for Scotland and Wales and increased budgets for government departments in England. This matter is being discussed on the 'Jeremy Vine show' on Radio 2 at the time of writing! This raises the question of whether public expenditure will be increased across the board or whether the 'Barnett formula' that has determined the allocation of public expenditure between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales since the 1970s will be revised – in favour of Northern Ireland rather than in favour of England!

The Queen's speech includes the following bills relevant to the economy: Automated & Electric Vehicles Bill, Space Industry Bill, High Speed 2 Phase 2a Bill, Smart Meter Bill, National Insurance Contributions Bill, Travel Protection Bill, Civil Liability Bill, Courts Bill, Financial Guidance and Claims Bill, Data Protection Bill, Draft Patient Protection Bill and Armed Forces Bill.

Conclusions

The fact that the Conservative government lost its overall majority in the House of Commons at the general election of June 2017 and is now dependent on the votes of the Democratic Unionist Party with whom a 'deal' is yet to be concluded, meant that the Queen's speech was delayed and contained no controversial proposals. However, it does contain several bills that are required to facilitate the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

The Queen's speech contained only one sentence on housing, one on social care, two on education, none on welfare and none on local government.

The Queen's speech offered 'more homes' but said nothing about the 'deals' with local authorities and housing associations that were envisaged in the Conservative manifesto, the future funding of supported housing, the extension of the 'right to buy' to housing associations or the sale of high value council homes.

The Queen's speech offered a consultation on 'improved social care' but while it appears clear that the proposals contained in the Conservative manifesto have been abandoned it is not clear what proposals the government will now come forward with.

The Queen's speech offered to ensure that 'all schools are fairly funded'. This is seen as signalling an end to the current proposals to redistribute schools' funding but it is not clear what approach may replace it.

There was no mention of local government reform, leading to concerns that projects such as the localisation of business rates may now be under threat.

There are fears that the proposed 'Great Repeal Bill' is likely to increase the powers of the executive and reduce the powers of Parliament because of the intention to authorise increased use of secondary legislation and regulations.

This Queen's speech is generally regarded as being very 'thin' and for being more significant for what it excludes rather than what it contains. However, the housing and local government sectors will welcome some of the proposals in the Queen's speech such as the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill. It is to be hoped that, despite the Parliamentary arithmetic and the government's focus on the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, the government will also make progress on matters of critical concern such as adult social care and supported housing.

Adrian Waite
June 2017

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