

# The second Queen's Speech of 2019: The Implications for Public Services

## December 2019



**The Houses of Parliament where the second Queen's Speech of 2019 was made on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019**

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### Introduction

The Queen's Speech of 2019 was made on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

The Queen said that the priority for her government was to deliver 'Brexit' on 31st January 2020, but that ministers also had an:

*"Ambitious programme of domestic reform that delivers on the people's priorities".*

The Queen's speech outlines the government's proposed legislative programme that they say will 'Get Brexit done' and allow the government and the country to move on to address the domestic agenda including the National Health Service, Adult Social Care and Housing.

This briefing paper summarises the main implications of the Queen's Speech for public services and some of the reactions to it, as well as providing some context and commentary.

## **Brexit**

This Queen's Speech is overshadowed by 'Brexit' which obviously dominates the government's agenda. The main piece of legislation will be the Withdrawal Agreement Bill. Furthermore, seven of the Bills that have been announced are devoted to Brexit.

The government said earlier this week that it would rule out any extension to the eleven-month post-Brexit transition period, in which the United Kingdom will continue to follow European Union rules but without any representation in European Union institutions. Ministers have said that they are confident of concluding a new trade deal by 31st December 2020 although many European Union officials and independent commentators are sceptical that this could be done in such a short amount of time. This raises the prospect of Britain leaving the 'European Union' without a deal at the end of 2020. Most commentators agree that this would have serious economic consequences. The bill will also enable British judges to depart from previous rulings of the European Court of Justice.

The seven 'Brexit' bills will be as follows:

- The European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill will ratify the deal secured by the Government in October, delivering Brexit.
- The Agriculture Bill will reform United Kingdom agriculture by improving environmental protections and strengthening transparency and fairness in the supply chain.
- The Fisheries Bill will enable the government to reclaim control over British waters, ensuring the sustainability of marine life and environment.
- The Trade Bill will establish the Trade Remedies Authority to protect United Kingdom industry from unfair trading practices.
- The government will end free movement and pave the way for a modern, fairer points-based immigration system.
- A Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill will provide a clear framework for cross-border resolutions for individuals, families and United Kingdom businesses involved in international legal disputes.
- A Bill to provide certainty, stability and new opportunities for the financial services sector.

## **Public Finances and the Economy**

In October 2019, the Institute for Fiscal Studies published an interesting report on the public finances in the light of the government's policies on 'Brexit'. It is entitled 'United Kingdom economic outlook in four Brexit scenarios'. It hit the headlines because of its predictions that 'Brexit' will lead to a significant increase in public sector debt, with the BBC thundering that 'No-deal Brexit would push United Kingdom debt to fifty-year high'.

Key findings include:

- Whether – and if so how and when – the United Kingdom leaves the European Union will be perhaps the key determinant of growth over the next few years.
- Securing a Brexit deal would be better for the economy over the next two to three years than another delay.
- A 'no-deal' Brexit would be economically considerably worse resulting in the economy contracting for two years.
- Revoking 'Brexit' would lead to the best economic outcome.

In the event of a 'No Deal Brexit' the Institute for Fiscal Studies assumes that the United Kingdom government would introduce a reflationary budget that would be designed to increase demand in the economy. This would include:

- The Bank of England cutting the Bank Rate to near zero by the end of 2019 and leaving it there until 2022. It would also restart asset purchases to the tune of £50billion.

- The United Kingdom government would cut taxes and raise spending by around 2% of Gross Domestic Product in the first year. This would see spending well above levels announced in the 2019 Spending Round, and a fiscal loosening in excess of the additional plans Mr Johnson announced in the 2019 Conservative Party leadership election.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies considers that 'fiscal easing efforts' would be increased to raise public consumption and investment. They point out that, in his 2019 Spending Round speech, Chancellor Sajid Javid commented that he had tasked the Treasury with developing a 'comprehensive economic response to support the economy if needed'. That could leave public consumption 2% higher and public investment 6% higher. They consider that almost any United Kingdom government would spend more in any Brexit scenario. But a no-deal case would be likely to see the most support forthcoming.

United Kingdom government debt has ballooned since 2008 and the government is still borrowing more. The report forecasts that government borrowing would increase from the planned £50billion a year to £100billion a year, the equivalent of 4% of Gross Domestic Product and twice the limit on public borrowing that has been set by HM Treasury.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies concludes that:

*"The government is in practice operating with no effective fiscal rules at present,"*

So, it appears to me that, for public services, 'Brexit', especially if it is a 'No-Deal Brexit' may result in a short-term increase in funding as the government attempts to sustain demand in the economy. However, in the longer-term, reduced growth, higher debt and a need to reduce taxes to align with the United States and the third world would be likely to result in significant reductions in funding for public services that might make the years of 'austerity' look like a time of plenty!

### **Infrastructure and Devolution**

The Queen announced that:

*"My Ministers will bring forward measures to ensure that every part of the United Kingdom can prosper. My Government will invest in the country's public services and infrastructure whilst keeping borrowing and debt under control; maintaining the sustainability of the public finances through a responsible fiscal strategy. My Government will prioritise investment in infrastructure and world-leading science research and skills, in order to unleash productivity and improve daily life for communities across the country. It will give communities more control over how investment is spent so that they can decide what is best for them."*

Specific proposals include:

- The government will publish a White Paper to reiterate their commitment to levelling up opportunities and investment in the regions across England.
- The government will reform business rates to protect high streets and communities from excessive tax hikes and keep town centres vibrant.

Details of the government's approach to infrastructure will therefore become available only when the white paper is published.

In October 2019, the Local Government Association had requested an English Devolution Bill that would give councils greater powers and funding to build more homes, secure the infrastructure essential to economic growth and equip people with the skills they need to succeed.

The government has previously said that it is prioritising enhanced devolution, with more metropolitan mayors, greater powers for existing mayors and more control locally of how money is spent or prioritised. However, this was not mentioned in the Queen's speech. It is considered that there may be a white paper that would be followed by legislation.

### **National Health Service**

The Queen announced that:

*“My Government will embark on an ambitious programme of domestic reform that delivers on the people's priorities. For the first time, the National Health Service's multi-year funding settlement, agreed earlier this year, will be enshrined in law.*

*“Steps will be taken to grow and support the National Health Service's workforce and a new visa will ensure qualified doctors, nurses and health professionals have fast-track entry to the United Kingdom. Hospital car parking charges will be removed for those in greatest need.”*

The Queen's Speech included:

- Legislation to enshrine in law the largest cash settlement in the National Health Service's history and to deliver the National Health Service Long Term Plan in England to ensure the health service is fit for the future.
- A Medicines and Medical Devices Bill will ensure that the National Health Service and patients can have faster access to innovative medicines, while supporting the growth of the domestic sector.
- The government will pursue reforms to make the National Health Service safer for patients.
- New visa arrangements to 'ensure qualified doctors, nurses and health professionals have fast-track entry to the United Kingdom'
- Hospital car parking charges 'will be removed for those in greatest need'

In his introduction to the background briefing notes that the government released alongside the Queen's speech, Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister, wrote that:

*“We will move on and focus on the people's priorities. And if there is one message that came through loud and clear over the past weeks, it is that the overwhelming priority of the British people is our National Health Service. Already we are giving the National Health Service the biggest ever cash injection in its history. We are upgrading 20 hospitals and building 40 more. We are going to have 50,000 more nurses, including grants for student nurses, 6,000 more primary care practitioners, 6,000 more doctors – and create 50 million more doctor's appointments. Now for the first time ever we will enshrine the National Health Service multi-year budget into law. We will introduce a new fast-track National Health Service visa to attract the best healthcare professionals from around the world. We will put an end to unfair hospital car parking charges for staff and vulnerable patients.”*

The Government has committed to a National Health Service multi-year funding settlement that will see a £33.9billion per annum increase in the National Health Service budget by 2023/24. However, this is not 'new money' and falls short of what is required to fund the National Health Service adequately or to meet increasing levels of need.

The government's commitment to increase expenditure on the National Health Service by £33.9billion a year amounts to a 3.4% year-on-year increase in expenditure, a significant increase on what the National Health Service has received since 2010. However, the increase is significantly lower than the 6% average annual increases seen between 1997 and 2010. When adjusted for inflation, and factoring in the increased cost of equipment, medicines and staff pay, it could be worth only £20.5billion by 2023/24.

It should also be remembered that, to keep pace with increased demand and inflation, the National Health Service needs funding increases of between 6% and 8% a year. There is also uncertainty surrounding the implications of 'Brexit' for the National Health Service with many commentators considering that it will result in increased prices for medical equipment and supplies, staff shortages and change resulting from the proposed trade agreement with the United States.

The government's commitment on the health service's funding will be enshrined in law, with an extra £33.9 billion a year provided by 2023/24. This measure appears to me to be a bit unnecessary and theatrical. If the funds are included in the government's budget they are already approved by Parliament. Furthermore, any legislation enacted now cannot protect future budgets because Parliament takes annual decisions on spending, cannot tie the hands of its successors and can always change its mind!

In September 2019 the National Health Service published a set of recommendations for legislation changes that would enable them to go faster and further in realising the ambitions set out in the ten-year National Health Service Long Term Plan to improve integration, reduce bureaucracy and promote collaboration. The government welcomes the National Health Service's leadership of this work, and all the input from people across the health and care system. The Government is committed to supporting the National Health Service Long Term Plan. They are considering the National Health Service's recommendations thoroughly and will bring forward detailed proposals shortly. In due course, they will publish draft legislation that will accelerate the Long-Term Plan for the National Health Service, transforming patient care and future-proofing the National Health Service.

Details of the government's proposals for the National Health Service are therefore still awaited and most commentators are agreed that implementing the Long-Term Plan for the National Health Service will require additional resources.

### **Local Government Finance**

The Queen announced that:

*"To support business, my government will... bring forward changes to business rates."*

These include plans for a 50% business rate discount for small firms, including independent cinemas, music venues and pubs. The government will bring forward the next business rates revaluation and make future revaluations in England more frequent.

In October 2019, the Local Government Association had requested a Local Government Finance Bill. They argued that Councils need next year's Spending Review to provide a long-term sustainable settlement, much needed certainty around funding and extra freedoms and flexibilities. They argued that this Bill should pave the way for local government to keep 100% of business rates and boost local services and set business rate discounts. It should also give councils full control over setting council tax, discounts and banding and provide a legal commitment to ensure councils get annual, rolling multi-year settlements.

The Queen's Speech did not contain any commitment to such a Local Government Finance Bill.

## Adult Social Care

The Queen announced that:

*“My Ministers will seek cross-party consensus on proposals for long term reform of social care. They will ensure that the social care system provides everyone with the dignity and security they deserve and that no one who needs care has to sell their home to pay for it. My ministers will continue work to reform the Mental Health Act.”*

In October 2019, the Local Government Association argued that the Government needed to publish its proposals for the future of adult social care as soon as possible to spark a truly nationwide public debate about the value of social care and how, as a nation, we will pay for it in the years ahead.

The Queen’s Speech included:

- A proposal to provide extra funding for social care. The government will urgently seek cross-party consensus for much needed long-term reform so that nobody needing care should be forced to sell their home to pay for it.
- A commitment for the government to continue to work to modernise and reform the Mental Health Act to ensure people get the support they need, with a much greater say in their care.

The government accepts that putting social care on a sustainable footing is one of the biggest long-term challenges facing society. They consider that the United Kingdom needs a long-term solution that will stand the test of time, and so they are committed to what they consider to be an ambitious three-point plan:

- The Government is providing councils with an additional £1 billion for adults and children’s social care in every year of this Parliament. In addition, the government will consult on a 2% precept that will enable councils to access a further £500million for adult social care for 2020/21. The government says that this funding will support local authorities to meet rising demand and continue to stabilise the social care system; and will help pay for more social care staff and better infrastructure, technology and facilities.
- The Government will urgently seek a cross-party consensus to bring forward the necessary proposals and legislation for long-term social care reform in England.
- In doing so, the Government will ensure that nobody needing care will be forced to sell their home to pay for it.

The funding referred to here was announced at the last spending review in September 2019. It follows nine years of significant reductions in local government funding that have helped to create a financial crisis in local government that is impacting on the ability of local authorities to deliver effective adult social care. Most people in the sector regard this additional funding as ‘too little, too late’.

This appears to me to be an inadequate response to the request of the Local Government Association let alone to the crisis that everyone acknowledges is faced by Adult Social Care services.

## Education

The Queen announced that:

*“To ensure every child has access to a high-quality education my Ministers will increase levels of funding per pupil in every school.”*

The government states that they are giving schools a multi-billion-pound boost, meaning that every school has more money for every child. They will also move towards delivering this funding directly to schools, through a single national formula. Presumably this means a further diminution of the role of local authorities in the funding of education.

## Housing

The Queen announced that:

*“New measures will be brought forward to protect tenants and to improve building safety. My Government will take steps to support home ownership, including by making homes available at a discount for local first-time buyers.”*

Specific bills include:

- A Renters’ Reform Bill will enhance renters’ security and improve protections for short-term tenants by abolishing ‘no-fault’ evictions and introducing a lifetime deposit.
- To ensure residents are safe in their homes, the government will bring forward measures to implement the most urgent recommendations from the first phase of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. They will also publish a draft Building Safety Bill to implement the recommendations of Dame Judith Hackitt’s review of building regulations.
- The government will re-introduce the Domestic Abuse Bill, strengthening protections for victims and providing new enforcement mechanisms.

The government’s other proposals for housing include:

- Supporting people to realise the dream of homeownership; as one of the biggest divides in the country is between those who can afford their own home and those who cannot.
- Launching a consultation on First Homes. This will provide homes for local people and key workers at a discount of at least 30% - saving them tens of thousands of pounds.
- Securing the discount on First Homes through a covenant. This means these homes will remain discounted in perpetuity, supporting people now and in the future, who aspire to own a home of their own.
- Renewing the Affordable Homes Programme, building hundreds of thousands of new homes for a range of people in different places. This will help them to prevent people from falling into homelessness while also supporting further people into homeownership.
- Introducing a new, reformed Shared Ownership model, making buying a share of a home fairer and more transparent. This new model will be simpler to understand and better able shared owners to buy more of their property and eventually reach full ownership.
- Delivering the homes that the country needs, the Government is committed to building at least a million more homes over this Parliament. In the coming months they will set out further steps to achieve this, including a Planning White Paper and funding for critical infrastructure.
- The Planning White Paper will make the planning process clearer, more accessible and more certain for all users, including homeowners and small businesses. It will also address resourcing and performance in Planning Departments.
- The new £10billion Single Housing Infrastructure fund will provide the roads, schools and General Practitioner surgeries needed to support new homes. Alongside First Homes, this will ensure local people truly benefit from house building in their area and build support for new developments.
- To help those who rent, the Government will build a rental system that is fit for the modern day – supporting landlords to provide high quality homes while protecting tenants. The Government’s Better Deal for Renters will fulfil manifesto commitments to abolish ‘no fault’ evictions and to introduce lifetime deposits, alongside further reforms to strengthen the sector for years to come.

- Taking forward a comprehensive programme of reform to end unfair practices in the leasehold market. This includes working with the Law Commission to make buying a freehold or extending a lease easier, quicker and more cost effective – and to reinvigorate commonhold and Right to Manage.
- Ensuring that if a new home can be sold as freehold, then it will be. They will get rid of unnecessary ground rents on new leases and give new rights to homeowners to challenge unfair charges. The Government will also close legal loopholes to prevent unfair evictions and make it faster and cheaper to sell a leasehold home.
- For those in the social rented sector, they will bring forward a Social Housing White Paper that will set out further measures to empower tenants and support the continued supply of social homes. This will include measures to provide greater redress, better regulation and improve the quality of social housing.
- Committing to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. The Government will continue to invest in key rough sleeping interventions, building on the progress that they made last year in reducing rough sleeping numbers. The Government will also continue to support those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping through the continued enforcement of the Homelessness Reduction Act<sup>1</sup>.

The target of a million homes is a substantial downgrade on the previous target of reaching 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s that was set in 2017. It is also 41,000 fewer homes a year than the current rate of net supply that reached 241,000 in November 2019 suggesting a belief that this figure represents a peak. The party did not set a target for affordable housing but did pledge to renew the Affordable Homes Programme in the Spring Statement. The manifesto does not mention social housing so it may be assumed that any affordable housing that would be built would be housing with rents set at 80% of market levels. Many in the sector consider that government should set a target to build a significant number of affordable homes including a significant number of social homes.

While the Conservatives plan to renew the affordable housing programme, there is no commitment to increasing the budget. In the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010, the government's budget for supporting capital investment in housing was reduced by 64%. This led to the abandonment of funding for social housing and the current focus on affordable housing. Without an increase in the budget it is unlikely that any increase in affordable house building could be afforded, let alone any increase in social house building.

The First Home scheme would be delivered through a change to the National Planning Policy Framework and through developers' Section 106 contributions that are currently a major route for the supply of affordable housing. The Conservatives believe the discount could apply to up to 19,000 homes by the mid-2020s and would be 'locked into the property'. An income threshold would apply – although this has not yet been revealed.

The Conservatives promise to deliver a new 'First Home' scheme, under which homes would be sold at 30% discounts to first-time buyers sounds like a revival of the 'Starter Homes' policy that the Conservatives introduced under David Cameron. The scheme was designed to arrest the decline in home ownership by subsidising first time buyers, including first time buyers with significant incomes who wanted to buy quite expensive properties. This was likely to have been at the expense of new affordable homes. The scheme was unpopular and complex and was quietly dropped by Theresa May with no starter homes having been provided. It will be interesting to see how the 'First Home' scheme will work.

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<sup>1</sup> This follows a government announcement that the number of households considered newly homeless or at risk of becoming so has increased by 11.4% across England in the past year, according to government figures, a rise of almost 7,000 households.



I have written a briefing paper on Starter Homes. To view or download a copy, please click [here](https://awics.co.uk/htrack/awics.co.uk/dynam-icdata/data/docs/starter%2520homes%2520-%2520briefing%2520paper.pdf): <https://awics.co.uk/htrack/awics.co.uk/dynam-icdata/data/docs/starter%2520homes%2520-%2520briefing%2520paper.pdf>

The government published a Social Housing Green Paper in August 2018. It was wide-ranging and included five chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Chapter 2 – Effective resolution of complaints
- Chapter 3 – Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator
- Chapter 4 – Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Chapter 5 – Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

The government intends to respond to the consultation and to follow up the Green Paper with a White Paper.

In October, the Local Government Association requested a Housing and Planning Bill that would empower councils to deliver the homes and infrastructure that communities need. This would include streamlining the local plan process, providing greater clarity and certainty in planning to reduce hostile applications, giving councils greater powers to act where house-building has stalled, scrapping permitted development rights and devolving Right to Buy so that councils retain all receipts and can set discounts locally.

The Queen's Speech did not contain any commitment to such a Housing and Planning Bill.

However, to make sure residents are safe in their homes, the government will take forward legislative measures that put in place new and modernised regulatory regimes for building safety and construction products. They will also ensure that residents have a stronger voice in the system.

In October 2019, the Local Government Association requested a Building Safety Bill that would implement the Hackitt Review recommendations and enshrine a tough new building safety system into law. This Bill would place new duties on building owners alongside a regulatory regime with effective sanctions and tougher product safety and assurance standards. Government policy complies with this request.

The announcement is not surprising. The creation of a new regulator has been part of the government's plans for post-Grenfell reform for some time. This is all part of moves to implement the findings of Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building safety. Theresa May's government had planned to introduce legislation in 2020 so the Queen's Speech has confirmed that Boris Johnson has not abandoned the plans. However, it has not provided any more detail than was available already.

It is universally accepted that Britain is facing a housing crisis. The lack of reference to the housing crisis and the lack of any new proposals to tackle the housing crisis are significant omissions from this Queen's Speech.

I have written a briefing paper on the proposals for housing that were contained in the Conservatives' general election manifesto of December 2019. To view or download a copy, please click [here](https://awics.co.uk/files/module_document_pdfs/election_manifestos_2019_-_the_implications_for_housing_-_briefing_paper.pdf): [https://awics.co.uk/files/module\\_document\\_pdfs/election\\_manifestos\\_2019\\_-\\_the\\_implications\\_for\\_housing\\_-\\_briefing\\_paper.pdf](https://awics.co.uk/files/module_document_pdfs/election_manifestos_2019_-_the_implications_for_housing_-_briefing_paper.pdf)

## Transport and Roads

In October 2019, the Local Government Association requested a Transport and Roads Bill that would give councils oversight of local transport systems by providing automatic access to franchising powers to all areas. This would also include fully funding the concessionary fares scheme and handing control over all the Bus Service Operators' Grant to councils so that public subsidies can be better targeted. It would also introduce an extension to the ban on pavement parking and the power to enforce moving traffic violations to all areas of England and give councils a portion of existing fuel duty to reinvest on local roads to help tackle the local roads repair backlog. While there were some proposals related to transport, the Queen's Speech did not contain any proposals along these lines.

## Police and Justice

The Queen announced that:

*"My Government is committed to a fair justice system that keeps people safe. My ministers will establish a Royal Commission to review and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice process. New sentencing laws will ensure the most serious violent offenders, including terrorists, serve longer in custody. New laws will require schools, police, councils and health authorities to work together to prevent serious crime. My Government will ensure those charged with knife possession face swift justice and that the courts work better for all those who engage with them, including victims of domestic abuse. Legislation will be brought forward to support victims of crime and their families. Measures will be developed to tackle hostile activity conducted by foreign states."*

A Royal Commission will be established to improve the 'efficiency and effectiveness' of the criminal justice process and there are bills that will ensure the most serious violent offenders serve longer prison terms.

At the Conservative Party conference, Justice Secretary Robert Buckland pledged to increase the time served in prison for those found guilty of the most serious violent and sexual offences. This is included in the Queen's Speech alongside proposals to offer more support to those affected by serious crime.

Proposals include:

- New sentencing laws to 'ensure the most serious violent offenders, including terrorists, serve longer in custody'
- Those charged with knife possession will face 'swift justice'

Home Secretary Priti Patel had already said that the government would bring in sentences that would make people 'think twice' before assaulting a police officer. A new 'police covenant' - a promise recognising the service and sacrifice of officers - to be enshrined in law – is also proposed. There will be a focus on foreign criminals.

This represents a reversal of the Conservatives' policy under Theresa May, David Gauke and Rory Stewart, where the emphasis was on reducing short-term sentences and prison populations.

The extra demands imposed on the justice system follow a period during which the Ministry of Justice, which oversees the courts and prisons, has suffered deeper budget cuts – 40% since 2010 – than any other Whitehall department. Reductions in the number of judicial sitting days to make short-term savings have added to frustrations among lawyers.

## **Electoral Registration**

The Queen announced that:

*“A Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission will be established. Work will be taken forward to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act.”*

The government will:

- Set up a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission to consider the relationship between Government, Parliament and the courts and to explore whether the checks and balances in the constitution are working for everyone.
- Take forward work to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act.
- Protect the integrity of democracy and elections, tackling electoral fraud through the introduction of voter ID and banning postal vote harvesting

Work will be taken forward to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act that would enable the Prime Minister to call an election without the consent of MPs

In October 2019, the Local Government Association requested an Electoral Bill that would provide a new electoral offence of intimidatory behaviour and provide guidance for the general public on what is reasonable protest and comment to improve civility in public life.

However, the government is proposing an ‘Electoral Integrity Bill’ that would take a different approach to that requested by the Local Government Association. Their bill would make showing ID such as driving licences or passports at the ballot box a requirement. The bill would also place restrictions on proxy voting. Critics of the measures maintain that they are not necessary to tackle limited amounts of election fraud and that they will have the effect of disenfranchising many voters. The more cynical critics maintain that this would be to the electoral advantage of the government.

The Electoral Reform Society estimates that photo ID for voting would cost up to £20million to enforce per election. According to Electoral Commission figures, more than 700 people were denied a vote in trials in ten council wards during May’s local elections. Figures showed of the 1,968 people who were initially refused a ballot paper for not having the necessary ID, 740 did not return, indicating they were denied a vote. That suggested the number of people denied a vote outnumbered the scale of alleged voter fraud in the whole United Kingdom last year by a factor of almost 100. It added that polling by the Electoral Commission showed electoral fraud was far down voters’ list of worries about elections.

## **Environment**

The Queen announced that the government will continue to take steps to meet net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050:

*“My Government will continue to take steps to meet the world-leading target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050... To protect and improve the environment for future generations, a bill will enshrine in law environmental principles and legally-binding targets.”*

While this is welcome, it will have significant financial implications for public services. This is especially the case with housing, where the cost of upgrading all housing association and local authority houses to being zero-carbon would be quite high.

However, climate emergency campaigners consider that this is an inadequate response to the climate crisis.

## Implications for Scotland

The Scottish Government has said that there must be early and close inter-governmental engagement on the impact on Scotland of Bills in the Queen's Speech. However, until there is more assurance that the United Kingdom Government respects the views of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government will not bring forward any parliamentary consent motions for provisions related to Brexit.

This position has been taken as the United Kingdom Government has made it clear that it is prepared to ignore the views of the Scottish Parliament on provisions or Bills related to exiting the European Union - even though Holyrood's consent is required under the rules of the current system of government. The United Kingdom Parliament does not normally legislate regarding devolved matters in Scotland without the consent of the Scottish Parliament, which is expressed through Legislative Consent Motions.

## Conclusions

Despite the Conservatives' victory in this month's general election, everything is still overshadowed by 'Brexit'. It is not possible for the government to devise long-term policies for any public services while the outcome of the 'Brexit' question is unclear. Whatever happens on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020, it will be followed by detailed negotiations with the European Union, the United States and other nations around the world. Therefore, the outcome of the 'Brexit' question will continue to be unclear for some time.

Where the government is saying something about public services (for example on the National Health Service, Adult Social Care and Housing), what it is saying is rather vague and dependent on future policy statements. Housing policy continues to be focused on home ownership rather than on building new affordable and social housing. The Queen's Speech also makes very little reference to how new policies could be funded, although the Conservative Party manifesto envisaged increased public expenditure funded through borrowing. The government's financial position continues to be weak and a budget is expected early in 2020.

In the meantime, there are no resources being made available to any public services in addition to those that were announced in September's spending review. This provided increased funding for the National Health Service and Adult Social Care, but most commentators consider that these increases are not enough to meet increasing need. Other services including local government and housing have experienced significant reductions in funding since 2010 and there are no proposals to increase funding to pre-2010 levels. However, there may be increases in public expenditure at the next budget, and these may be significant if there is an economic downturn following 'Brexit' and the government responds by increasing public expenditure and borrowing even further than was envisaged in their manifesto.

A copy of the government's background briefing on the Queen's speech can be viewed or downloaded on their website at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/853886/Queen\\_s\\_Speech\\_December\\_2019\\_-\\_background\\_briefing\\_notes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/853886/Queen_s_Speech_December_2019_-_background_briefing_notes.pdf)

**Adrian Waite**  
**December 2019**

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## About 'AWICS'

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