



Queen's Speech

on-the-day briefing

This morning the Queen has set out the Johnson Government's proposed legislative agenda. There are announcements of particular interest to NHC members on Building Safety and English Devolution, summarised below. The NHC will continue to engage with Government on your behalf on these and other issues.

Building Safety

As had been trailed, the speech revealed the Government's desire "to bring forward laws to implement new building safety standards". The proposed **Building Safety Standards Bill** is designed to compel builders to much more stringent safety standards within the design, construction and occupation of high-rise buildings. This will take forward the recommendations of the 'Hackitt Report' into Building Regulations and Fire Safety.

The creation of such a regulator has been touted as being part of the Government's plans for reform in the wake of the disaster for some time now, with the plans first posed by Theresa May's government.

The new safety framework looks to provide clearer accountability for those responsible for buildings as well as giving a stronger voice to residents, particularly within the safety maintenance of their homes. The framework carries with it harsher sanctions designed to deter non-compliance to ensure that mistakes are not repeated. The bill seeks to develop a national oversight of construction products across the whole built environment, ensuring all products meet high-performance standards. Specifically within housing, the Government intends to create a New Homes Ombudsman, to which all developers of new build houses must belong.

Shortly after the speech the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government referenced it in a tweet stating that the Government remains

committed to ending unfair leasehold arrangements and confirmed a commitment to ensuring that the practice will be abandoned for new-build houses in all but "exceptional circumstances". Whilst the speech referenced that the Government is seeking to "bring forward measures to protect individuals, families and their homes," there was no mention of freeholds explicitly.

English Devolution

A **White Paper on English Devolution** was also announced as part of the Speech. The Government say this will set out their strategy to deliver enhanced growth and productivity, and will cover institutions, spending priorities, local economic plans and local growth funding. They have reconfirmed their commitment to the long-awaited Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Government notes that over 50% of the North's population is already covered by city region mayors, and intends for the White Paper to set out plans for more mayors, further devolution deals and a 'levelling up' of powers between mayors and combined authorities. The Government have briefed that the White Paper will also detail 'structural and institutional reforms' intended to support devolution, which may be a reference to potential local government reforms – in recent weeks, the Secretary of State has expressed scepticism on the long-term viability of the district council model.

White Papers set out policy preferences as a prelude to legislation (where this is needed). The announcement of a White Paper on these issues should therefore be seen as a statement of intent which may take some time to realise.

An uncertain outlook

Clearly, current political instability may mean this agenda is short-lived. [**Join us at the Northern Housing Summit on 5th November**](#), where we'll hear from former Downing Street Chief of Staff Gavin Barwell and others on what the future may hold for housing in the North.