



Queen's Speech

on-the-day briefing

This morning the Queen has set out the majority Conservative Government's proposed legislative agenda. This is the second Queen's Speech in recent months (a previous one was delivered in the minority Parliament in October). We can expect the programme from today's Speech to have a rather longer shelf life than its predecessor.

Key commitments in the Speech included:

- Leaving the EU institutions by 31st January
- Legislating for the Conservative Party's NHS funding package
- A commitment to seek a long-term cross-party consensus on social care.

For Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) members, items of particular interest include the **Building Safety** and **English Devolution** measures previously announced in October; and new announcements on **Renters Rights**, **Planning Reform**, **Home Ownership** and **Decarbonisation**.

In this NHC on-the-day briefing we look at the new announcements, and recap the re-announcements from October, highlighting any changes.

Commenting on the Queen's Speech, NHC Executive Director (Policy and Public Affairs) Brian Robson said:

"This is a significant programme, and there are elements of it – particularly on devolution, planning and decarbonisation – which will provide opportunities for the Government to demonstrate they are delivering on their election commitments to 'level up' the North. The NHC and our members stand ready to work with Government to ensure its measures deliver for people and communities across the North."

Renters' Reform Bill

A long trail of commitments to reform the private rented sector, beginning under Theresa May's Government, has now culminated in proposals in today's Queen's Speech for a **Renters' Reform Bill**. Such a Bill did not feature in Boris Johnson's first Queen's Speech in October 2019, and therefore the reforms, and in particular the abolition of Section 21, were the focus of much speculation as to whether they would survive under the new Prime Minister.

The commitment has now been restated, as part of a suite of measures to 'support workers and families'. Building on the consultation carried out over the summer, the Renters Reform Bill will look to deliver a fairer, more effective, and 'professionalised' rental market through greater affordability and security of tenure for tenants and accountability for landlords and lettings agents.

Whilst the Government will abolish the use of 'no fault' evictions by removing section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, greater rights will also be given to landlords who wish to gain possession of their property through the courts where there is a legitimate need for them to do so. Work will also begin to improve the court process for landlords to make it quicker and easier for them to get their property back sooner.

Building on the Tenant Fees Act, which came into force in June 2019 and caps tenancy deposits to 5 weeks' rent, a **new lifetime deposit** will be introduced. Tenancy Deposit Reform has been consulted on by the Government and its responses to this consultation will inform legislation, allowing for deposits to be 'transferred' as tenants move properties.

The Government will also look to widen access to, and expand the scope of, the database of **rogue landlords and property agents**. The database in its current form has received criticism for its usability and transparency. Reaffirming its commitment to giving tenants access to the database, the Government hopes reforms will give the powers needed to drive improvements in standards and empower tenants to make an informed choice about who they rent from.

Improving standards in the North's private rented market has been a focus for the NHC for some time now, particularly in its role as secretariat to the **All Party Parliamentary Group Housing in the North** who were undertaking an Inquiry into this subject in the last Parliament. Campaigners will be happy to see a focus on both security of affordability *and* tenure, whilst Local Authorities will welcome changes to improve the use of the rogue landlord database. As ever, those on the frontline of helping to improve private sector housing will note that promises of new or expanded powers are only useful alongside the resources to implement them effectively. The NHC will continue to support members to implement legislative change, and to influence Government to enable genuine renewal of our housing stock.



Supporting Home Ownership

The Queen pledged that her Government would 'take steps to support home ownership'.

This takes the form of a consultation on **First Homes** which is soon to be launched. First Homes was a Conservative Manifesto commitment to homes available for 'local people and key workers' at a 30% discount, with the discount preserved in perpetuity.

Background briefing commits the Government to renewing the **Affordable Homes Programme**, with a pledge that it will both deliver home ownership products and prevent homelessness. Government documents refer to the Fund helping 'a range of people in different places'. The NHC will continue to back wider sector calls for an ambitious expansion of this programme at the Spending Review, and [lobby to ensure this fund continues to be available to the whole of the North](#) and is not subjected to crude geographical targeting measures.

Social Housing White Paper

In addition to commitments to improve both home ownership and the experience of the private rented sector, the Government has again outlined its intention to bring forward a **Social Housing White Paper**. Announced originally as the Green Paper *A New Deal for Social Housing* in August 2018, the sector had previously expected Government action in September of this year after Theresa May announced the publication of a Green Paper Action Plan in one of her last speeches as Prime Minister. This failed to emerge.

The promised Social Housing White Paper, once published, 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.

The NHC worked closely with government ministers through the consultation period of the Social Housing Green Paper and will look forward to working with members to implement actions arising out of the forthcoming White Paper.

Planning and Infrastructure

The Government has confirmed the Conservative election commitment to 1 million new homes over this Parliament (itself a reduction on the previous aspiration of 300,000 homes per annum).

A **Planning White Paper** is promised 'in the coming months'. This aims to make the planning process 'clearer, more accessible and more certain' for all users. Of particular interest to NHC members is the commitment that the White Paper will 'address resourcing and performance in planning departments'. As members will be aware, the NHC has commissioned research on housing and planning capacity in northern councils, which we plan to publish early in the New Year, and which we hope will inform the development of the White Paper.

A **Single Housing Infrastructure Fund** of £10bn is promised. This seems likely to merge various funds managed by Homes England such as the Housing Infrastructure



Fund, Small Sites Fund etc. The vast majority of these funds are currently geographically targeted on areas of 'high affordability pressure', locking the North out from access to them. It is vital the same mistakes are not made with the replacement fund, if the Government is to deliver on its commitment to 'level up' the North.

Decarbonisation and Climate Change

The Government intends to continue taking steps to meet the target of **net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050**, it says it will continue to lead the way in tackling global climate change, hosting the COP26 Summit in Glasgow next year.

The Government announced it will continue with its programme of policy and investment. There will be £4bn invested in flood defences, and £9.2bn invested in the energy efficiency of homes, schools and hospitals to help lower energy bills over the course of the Parliament. Costings released alongside the Conservative Manifesto suggested this financial commitment will be split between **Homes Upgrade grants** for the private sector; and a '**Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund**' which will reach £410m per annum by 2023/24. Government will bring the total invested in low carbon innovation since 2015 to £3bn by 2021.

A new Prime Minister-chaired **Cabinet Committee on Climate Change** has been set up to ensure focus on this challenge across all areas of Government. Background briefing recommits Government to the **Future Homes Standard by 2025**, where new build homes will be future-proofed with low carbon heating and 'world-leading' energy efficiency standards by 2025.

The Government stated the "UK has decarbonised faster than any other G20 nation since 2000, are a world-leader in offshore wind, and there are now nearly 400,000 jobs in low carbon industries and their supply chains". It also said that between 2010 and 2018, average household energy bills fell by 14 per cent and the UK's renewable electricity capacity has quadrupled.

The NHC's Chief Executive, Tracy Harrison has written for [Inside Housing](#) on climate change and the NHC's member-led board have agreed to develop a programme of work in this area, focussing on large-scale, carbon-focused renewal of the North's housing stock. The NHC team is now stepping up engagement with members at all levels to understand your priorities within this agenda. Please contact Executive Director (Policy and Public Affairs), [Brian Robson](#) to help us shape our activity around this core policy objective.

English Devolution

The Prime Minister's foreword to the Queens' Speech Briefing gives his personal commitment to 'a complete transformation of our country... investing in and leveling up every part of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland'.

The commitment from October's Queen's Speech to a **White Paper on English Devolution** is carried over. This White Paper will set out the Government's strategy to 'level up' powers and investment across England, increasing the number of Mayors and doing more devolution deals. These announcements are particularly significant for parts



of Yorkshire, the North East, Lancashire, Cumbria and Cheshire which currently lack Mayoral and/or Combined Authority arrangements.

It seems the White Paper will cover very similar ground to the proposals announced in October, but there are some subtle and potentially important differences:

- Today's briefing refers to 'full' devolution across England, rather than the 'enhanced' version promised in October, suggesting Government may be minded to go further on this agenda
- References to 'structural and institutional reform' made in the October briefing have disappeared. These had been taken to refer to potential reorganisation of areas with two-tier local Government. A question mark must now hang over this
- There is new reference to 'implementing an effective funding model' for Mayoral and Combined Authorities, which will be a significant and potentially welcome development given the limited funding such Authorities have had to date.

The Government have re-committed to the **Northern Powerhouse**; and to the long-awaited **UK-wide Shared Prosperity Fund**. Briefings have also committed to a long-term replacement for EU Structural Funds, though specific reference made in October to spending the 'same tax money' on this replacement has been removed.

White Papers set out policy preferences as a prelude to legislation (where this is required). 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.

We expect the White Paper to emerge early in the New Year, and the NHC will brief members and respond on your behalf.

Building Safety

Today's proposals on Building Safety look very similar indeed to October's, with commitment to a **Building Safety Bill**, and only minimal changes to wording and no departure from any of the plans put forward less than two months ago. Whilst continuing the firm line set out in October's Queen's Speech, the Government now refers to the implementation of new 'measures ... to improve building safety', as opposed to October's promise of new 'laws ... to implement new building safety standards'. This change presumably reflects the broader scope of the action Government intends to take beyond just legislative changes.

The Government have reiterated its plans to publish a **Building Safety Bill**, implementing the 53 recommendations of Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building regulations, and wishing in some areas to go further.

The findings of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry have been accepted in principle and Government states that it aims to respond to Sir Martin Moore-Bick's recommendations ahead of the second phase hearings of the Inquiry - which are set to commence on 27th January 2020. There is a fundamental promise to 'learn lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire' by ensuring accountability and responsibility is foremost within the culture of the industry. Given the need to respond to Sir Martin Moore-Bick's Inquiry, the NHC expects the Building Safety Bill will emerge later in the spring.



The proposals set out today are very much unchanged from October, with a strong voice for residents which cannot be ignored and clear instructions on how residents can be involved in the process of maintaining safety in their buildings. Strong sanctions against non-compliance are touted, ensuring that blame is firmly seated will those responsible, and the framework carries with it harsher sanctions designed to deter non-compliance to ensure that mistakes are not repeated. Briefing notes that subsequent to October's speech the Government has published a revised, clarified version of the Building Regulations' fire safety guidance (Approved Document B) and will be issuing a call for evidence as the first step in a full technical review of the guidance.

The remainder of the bill is an exact replica of October's offering, repeating the Government's intention to seek 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. The promise to provide increased funding to enable tailored building checks and inspections on all high-risk residential buildings in England by 2021 is repeated, backed to the tune of £10m per year, with a further £600m funding allocated for the replacement of unsafe ACM cladding on high-rise residential homes in the social and private sectors.

Conclusion

Today's Queen's Speech sets out a significant legislative programme for the new majority Conservative Government. The NHC will be closely tracking the White Papers and legislation that are most relevant to our members across the North; and seeking to influence the important 2020 Spending Review. Throughout this, we will clearly set out the role housing in the North can play in delivering on the Government's ambitions to 'level up' our country and green our economy. We can only do this thanks to the ongoing support of our 140+ members across the North – we look forward to working with you in 2020 and beyond.

If you have any queries on this briefing, or wish to get more involved in the NHC's Policy and Public Affairs activity, please contact:

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