

The Chelgate Queen's Speech 2007 Briefing Paper



Introduction

The Queen today delivered her annual speech on the governments planned legislation over the coming parliamentary year. The Queen's Speech, or *Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech* as it is formally referred to, was delivered before both Houses of Parliament and, in accordance with tradition, formed part of the State Opening of Parliament. The Speech itself was followed by a debate on its content in the House of Commons.

Context

In the run up to his first Queen's Speech as Prime Minister Gordon Brown has found himself under considerable pressure. The fallout from the election that never was has continued to blight him in recent weeks, along with a series of less than convincing performances at Prime Minister's Questions.

Although a Populus poll for the Times published on the day of the speech shows Labour and the Tories neck and neck on 37% and 36% respectively, Brown's standing among voters has been undeniably damaged by the election-that-never-was, with the same Populus research showing that Brown's personal lead over David Cameron has been wiped out. He will be hoping that the proposed legislation announced in the Speech will turn the political tide back in his favour after a good month for the Conservatives.

Content

The content of the Queen's speech was largely dominated by new anti-terror laws, proposals to ease the housing shortage and planned legislation on party funding. The Bills included were as follows:

Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Supplementary Provisions) Bill

- The Bill sets out provisions which clarify the legal and regulatory position of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link ahead of a restructuring of the company which built the link.

Children and Young Persons Bill

- The Bill will, if passed, would reform the regulatory framework of the care system in a number of ways.
- Also aims to ensure that children do not move schools in Years 10 and 11, except in exceptional circumstances.

Child Maintenance and Other Payments Bill

- The main feature of the Bill is the replacement of the Child Support agency with the Child Maintenance & Enforcement Commission. The Bill would also introduce a lump-sum compensation scheme for people suffering from mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer.

Climate Change Bill

- In announcing the Bill the Queen stated that it would "make the United Kingdom the first country in the world to introduce a legally binding framework to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.
- The Bill contains the commitment to reduce CO2 emissions by 60% by 2050.

Counter-Terrorism Bill

- The Bill would enable post-charge questioning of terrorist suspects and the drawing of "adverse inferences" from refusals to say something which is later relied on in court.
- The Bill would also ensure that the police and intelligence services can make full use of DNA, and that convicted terrorists keep police updated with personal information after they are released from

- prison.
- Convicted terrorists would be banded from travelling overseas.

Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill

- The Bill would lead to non-dangerous criminals being jailed for only 28 days when they breach the terms of their release.
- The Bill also aims introduce Violent Offenders Orders, which are post-sentence restrictions on violent offenders.

Crossrail Bill

- The Bill would give the necessary powers to build Crossrail, a railway stretching from east to west across Central London. The Bill was carried over from the previous session, having originally been introduced in February in 2005.

Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Bill

- The Bill aims to allow the government to use money held in bank and building society accounts which have not been used for 15 years to provide more youth facilities.

Education and Skills Bill

- If passed the Bill will require all 16 to 18-year-olds to stay in education or training by 2015.
- The Bill will also place a duty on employers to release young people for the equivalent of one day's training a week.

Employment Bill

- The Bill would, according to the government, provide clearer and stronger enforcement of employment law and to bring in measures to resolve disputes more quickly.

Energy Bill

- The Bill would provide greater incentives for renewable energy generation.
- It would also make it easier for private firms to invest in offshore gas supply infrastructure and carbon capture research.

European Communities (Finance) Bill

- This Bill would amend the European Communities Act 1972 – to change the way the UK finances the annual EC budget. It allows the UK to make payments direct from the government's own bank account.

European Union Reform Treaty Bill

- Would bring into UK law the EU Reform Treaty, which is due to be signed by the EU heads of government in December.

Health and Social Care Bill

- The Bill would establish the Care Quality Commission to inspect and intervene in failing hospitals. The Commission would combine the functions of the existing Healthcare Commission, Commission for Social Care Inspection and Mental Health Act Commission.
- The Bill would also bolster professional regulation.

Housing Regeneration Bill

- This Bill would merge the Housing Corporation, which distributes funds to housing associations to build new social housing, and English Partnerships, which plans housing projects in new growth areas.
- It would also implement the recommendations of the Cave Review of Social Housing Regulation.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill

- The Bill aims to ensure that the creation and use of all human embryos outside the body is regulated.

Local Road Transport Bill

- The Bill would pave the way for local authorities to set up local road-pricing schemes.

National Insurance Contributions Bill

- The Bill would harmonise the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions with the higher rate income tax threshold.

Pensions Bill

- The main feature of the Bill would be the automatic enrolment of eligible workers into a pensions scheme, with a minimum employer contribution introduced.

Planning Reform Bill

- The Bill would reform the planning system in England, meaning that planning permission is not required for many “minor” home improvements.
- The Bill also aims to introduce an independent infrastructure planning commission to deal with major planning projects.

Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Bill

- According to the government the Bill aims to “reduce unnecessary burdens” placed on business by local authority regulations.

Sale of Student loans Bill

- The Bill will, if passed, allow the student loan book to be sold off.

Draft Bills

In her speech the Queen announced the introduction of the following draft bills:

- Draft Apprenticeships Bill
- Draft Citizenship and Immigration Bill
- Draft Constitutional Renewal Bill
- Draft Cultural Property (Armed Conflict) Bill
- Draft Heritage Protection Bill
- Draft Marine Bill
- Draft Marine Navigation and Port Safety Bill

Reaction

Conservatives - David Cameron claimed to support many of the bills contained in the Queen’s Speech, but also said that it contained little in the way of original legislation and accused Brown of being “not capable of offering anything new.”

Liberal Democrats- Acting leader Vince Cable claimed the Speech was an “anticlimax” which contained “little vision”, and attacked the government’s plans on planning, anti-terror laws, and electoral reform.

TUC - The TUC has welcomed the Housing Regeneration Bill, with General Secretary Brendan Barber praising it as “an important tool for bringing about the Government’s plans for more new affordable homes.” Barber also welcomed the announcement of a Draft Apprenticeships Reform Bill and plans to review the right to request flexible working hours.

CBI - CBI Deputy Director-General John Cridland welcomed the streamlining of the planning system, the Energy Bill, and the Climate Change Bill. However he warned the government against “dampening innovation” in the banking sector and increasing the number of people requesting flexible working hours “too far too fast.”