

Possible Queen's Speech and implications for Rural



The RSN has considered the areas included in last year's Queen's speech, and what has happened this year which may have implications for upcoming legislation to be mentioned in the Queen's Speech 2022.

We start with the [Procurement Bill](#) and [Planning Bill](#) which haven't happened yet despite mention last year

The second section explores those areas of particular interest/relevance to rural areas which could be the subject of future legislation. These topics might be mentioned in the Queen's Speech 2022 or be the subject of draft bills in the next session and include:

- [Social Housing Regulation Bill](#)
- [Home education](#)
- [School funding](#)
- [Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) reforms](#)
- [Lifelong Loan Entitlement](#)
- [Reform of the Mental Health Act](#)
- [Access to cash](#)
- [Levelling Up](#)
- [Local government](#)

Procurement Bill

The Queen's Speech 2021 stated that a Public Procurement Bill would be brought forward during the 2021-22 Session when Parliamentary time allows. That has not happened; however, the Government has responded to its earlier consultation, and is expected to bring a Procurement Bill forward in the next session.

Procurement rules set out how public authorities buy or commission supplies, services and public works. Current UK procurement rules largely mirror EU procurement law, with a few UK-specific rules. From 1 January 2021, changes to EU procurement law no longer apply to the UK. So far, the Government has largely maintained the status quo, but its view is that leaving the EU has presented an opportunity for substantial reform – to create a procurement regime that is tailored to the UK's needs, is more modern, innovative, and less bureaucratic

On 15 December 2020, the Government published a green paper on transforming public procurement. It said that the goal of the reform was to speed up and simplify procurement processes, focus on value for money in public procurement, create opportunities for small businesses and support innovation in public service delivery. The new Bill would:

- Put procurement principles – value for money, the public good, transparency, integrity, efficiency, fair treatment of suppliers and non-discrimination – on a statutory basis.
- Simplify the current legislation as far as possible into a single, streamlined regulatory framework.
- Diversify supplier base by establishing a single digital platform for registration and a new Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS+).
- Embed transparency throughout the commercial lifecycle from planning of procurement to completion of a contract.
- Besides seeking value for money, public authorities would be encouraged to have regard for wider economic, social and environmental outcomes of procurement throughout the procurement process – developing procurement strategy, drafting the contract terms and evaluating tenders.
- Raise the standard of suppliers by considering their past performance and preventing unacceptable behaviour such as fraud.
- Make challenging procurement decisions faster and more accessible.

A consultation on these proposals closed on 10 March 2021. On 6 December 2021, the Government published its response to the consultation

Planning Bill

A Planning Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech 2021.

When he appeared before the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee in November 2021, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove, was asked how long he was going to pause the planning reforms and whether they might be abandoned. He said that they would not be. In February 2022, the Telegraph reported that Michael Gove had told Conservative backbenchers that plans for a standalone Planning Bill had been abandoned, with more limited planning reforms to be taken forward through a Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

In an interview with the Financial Times in March 2022, the Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce, Andy Haldane, said levelling up legislation would be introduced by June 2022. Discussing that interview on Twitter, Sebastian Payne of the Financial Times reported that levelling up goals “will be tied in with planning reform”.

BILLS FORESHADOWED

The following section reports statements, government publications and press speculation which suggest the following areas of particular interest/relevance to rural areas which could be the subject of future legislation. These topics might be mentioned in the Queen’s Speech 2022 or be the subject of draft bills in the next session.

Social Housing Regulation Bill

The Government’s social housing white paper – The Charter for Social Housing – published on 17 November 2020, is intended to deliver “transformational change” for social housing residents in England. It sets out measures to:

- Ensure social housing is safe.
- Make it easier to know how social landlords are performing, to increase transparency and accountability.
- Ensure swift and effective complaint resolution.
- Strengthen the consumer standards social landlords must meet and create a strong, proactive regime to enforce them.
- Empower residents to support them in engaging with and holding their landlords to account.
- Ensure good quality, decent homes and neighbourhoods.
- Support tenants to buy a home of their own.

The roles of the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman are being strengthened to help deliver these measures.

Some reforms will require primary legislation before they can be implemented. The Government’s levelling up white paper included a commitment to bring forward a Social Housing Regulation Bill. The Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Michael Gove, confirmed to the LUHC Select Committee that the Government hoped to introduce the Bill in May or June 2022.

Schools/Learning policy

Home education

The Department for Education (DfE) published its response to a consultation on education for children not in school in February 2022, which made proposals relating to home education in England.

The response confirmed the Government was “committed to a registration system for children not in school” and would be engaging with local authorities and the home educating sector as well as undertaking further work on the “practical aspects of delivery.”

Legislation will be required to establish a register, but the Government has not yet indicated when this will be brought forward.

School funding

The DfE published its response to a consultation on school funding in March 2022.

Since the 2018/19 financial year, a reformed National Funding Formula (NFF) has been used in England to determine how much mainstream schools attract in core revenue funding. Currently, the NFF is only being used to work out notional allocations for individual schools. These are then aggregated, adjusted, and passed to local authorities, who then draw up local funding formulas for distribution. This is known as a soft NFF.

The Government has said it remains committed to introducing a hard NFF, i.e., one with a reduced role for local authorities in deciding allocations. The March 2022 consultation response confirmed the Government's intention to proceed with this change. The response stated that the Government would bring forward legislation "at the earliest opportunity."

The DfE will publish a second stage consultation with more detailed proposals on implementing the hard NFF in spring 2022.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms

In September 2019, five years after the introduction of the current system of SEND support, the Government announced a review of the SEND system's effectiveness. As a result of the review, a green paper consulting on reforms was published in March 2022.

The green paper includes the Government's plans to create new national SEND standards, to create consistency in provision across England. The paper stated the Government plans to bring forward legislation to place the standards on a statutory footing for the early years and education sectors, covering ages 0-25.

The consultation on the green paper is open until 1 July 2022, with a national SEND delivery plan expected later in the year.

Lifelong Loan Entitlement

On 29 September 2020, Prime Minister gave a speech announcing new lifetime skills guarantee and loan, to allow people to undertake education and training throughout their life. He said: "We'll give everyone a flexible lifelong loan entitlement to four years of post-18 education — so adults will be able to retrain with high level technical courses, instead of being trapped in unemployment."

The Government's ambition is for the lifelong loan entitlement (LLE) to replace the two existing systems of publicly funded higher education loans. The intention is for the LLE to be used flexibly across an adult's lifetime, for full-time or part-time study of modules or full qualifications at levels 4 to 6, in colleges or universities, from 2025.

Provisions for the introduction of the LLE were included in the Skills and Post-16 Education [HL] Bill. However, during this Bill's progress in the House of Lords, Baroness Barran said the Government intended to consult on the "ambition, objectives and coverage" of the LLE, before bringing further primary legislation at a later date, setting out how it will work in practice.

A consultation on the LLE was launched on 24 February 2022.

Reform of the Mental Health Act

On 13 January 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care published a white paper on Reforming the Mental Health Act. The paper set out reforms which build on recommendations made by an

independent review in December 2018: Modernising the Mental Health Act: Increasing choice, reducing compulsion.

The Government consulted on the white paper's proposals from January to April 2021 and published a consultation response in July 2021. The Government said it will continue to work with stakeholders to refine the proposals and will share a draft Mental Health Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny "when parliamentary time allows".

Access to cash

In the 2020 Budget, the Government announced it would legislate "to protect access to cash and ensure that the UK's cash infrastructure is sustainable in the long-term."

The Treasury published a consultation document on access to cash on 1 July 2021, setting out its proposals.

The consultation proposed ensuring there would be "reasonable access" for withdrawal and deposit facilities for personal customers, and deposit facilities for small business customers. It would set and amend geographic access requirements to achieve this. These might, for instance, set targets to ensure that a certain percentage of the population was within a specified distance of a service point.

The Government proposed giving HM Treasury powers to designate certain firms on which cash access requirements could be imposed. This would initially cover large retail banking providers like banks and building societies.

The Financial Conduct Authority would be given "overarching regulatory oversight of the retail cash system" and so would monitor and enforce powers on designated firms. This would formalise and strengthen its oversight of proposals for closing bank branches and ATMs.

It's most likely that any such legislation would be part of a wider Financial Services Bill.

Levelling up

In February 2022, the Government published a white paper setting out its plans to address and narrow geographic inequalities.

The levelling up white paper states the Government will introduce legislation to put into statute some aspects of the agenda:

- The Government committed to introducing a "statutory obligation to report annually on progress towards meeting the Levelling Up missions. The levelling up "missions", or targets, are set out in the white paper and have a 2030 end date. The missions include improving living standards, raising educational attainment, reducing health disparities, restoring a sense of local pride, and empowering local leadership.
- The white paper states the Government is exploring legislation to expand, deepen and improve devolution in England.
- The white paper states that "wider planning measures" would be introduced alongside levelling up legislation.

In March, the Financial Times reported that the Government's Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce, Andy Haldane, said levelling up legislation will be introduced by June 2022.

Local Government

The levelling up white paper states the Government will explore using legislation to “expand devolution to more places, deepen current devolution deals and enable the devolution process to be simpler and more transparent”. The white paper includes two specific commitments to legislate in the area of local government. These include:

- enabling combined authorities to be created that consist solely of upper-tier authorities, omitting district councils from full membership;
- Adjusting the Empty Homes Premium, allowing council tax to be doubled after one year instead of two on properties that are “unoccupied and substantially unfurnished.”

Legislative commitments related to local government from other sources include:

- Legislation to move from a five-yearly to a three-yearly cycle for business rates revaluations. The Government is also consulting on some technical adjustments to the business rates system, including adjusting the definition of ‘material changes of circumstance’; using the Consumer Price Index instead of the Retail Price Index to set the small business multiplier; and altering the mechanism for updating the central rating list.
- The Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA) is to be established, following a government consultation that was originally published in March 2021. A further consultation published in 2021 stated the Government plans to make ARGA the lead authority for local audit.

Further legislation could arise from the following commitments in the levelling up white paper, but this seems unlikely to form part of a Bill in 2022:

- A commitment to “explore further flexibilities” with combined authorities for them to “raise their own funding through the business rates system to fund local priorities, whilst also considering the impacts on business”;
- The review of neighbourhood governance which will include looking at “the role and functions of parish councils in England and how to make them quicker and easier to establish”;
- Consultation on enabling metro-mayors to take on responsibility for fire and rescue services. The white paper states this will appear in another forthcoming white paper entitled “Reforming Our Fire Service”.

OTHER POSSIBILITIES

- A Landscape or ‘Nature’ Bill (including any legislative changes needed) over Government’s final response to the Glover Review of designated landscapes)
- Energy and/or national infrastructure resilience/financing Bill
- Health and Care Integration Bill