

Rural Lens Review

The King's Speech 2024



A Review By the
Rural Services Network
July 2024

The Rural Services Network has considered the [The King's Speech 2024](#) and an overview is provided below:

- Overall, across the 39 Bills (see full list in the Appendix to this Rural Lens Review) referred to there is little in the King's Speech that appears to directly address issues of concern to rural people, communities or businesses, as opposed to other areas.
- The opening words of The King's Speech state "My Government's legislative programme will be mission led and based on the principles of security, fairness and opportunity for all. The Labour Party Manifesto on this subject said "Britain needs a new approach: mission-driven government. Mission-driven government means raising our sights as a nation and focusing on ambitious, measurable, long-term objectives that provide a driving sense of purpose for the country. It means a new way of doing government that is more joined up, pushes power out to communities and harnesses new technology" The RSN would comment that, **fundamentally in a Mission Led approach, there is the need to protect rural communities by ensuring that the metrics used to devise strategies or programmes for growth (including skills) are not based on 'one-size-fits-all' thinking but reflect the disadvantage in rural economies within regions.**
- It will be essential that the Government fully '**rural proofs**' its ambitions, proposals, and delivery plans. In order for rural communities to be sustainable, mainstream policies must be workable in rural areas. Change is needed to overcome years of under investment and public sector austerity and issues with the rural policy framework.
- A key question is '**How will the Government ensure that rural communities and businesses get a 'fair share' of the resources and outcomes proposed**'? **The RSN continues to argue the need for a cross-department Rural Strategy.**
- An essential first step must be to review the funding formulae used to distribute funding to Councils and all other bodies delivering services to rural areas. **Without this the promised outputs will be unfairly distributed if delivered through the current formulae.**

The note below is intended as a briefing note on the main points of relevance in the King's Speech and the Government's more detailed Briefing Pack from a rural services, rural business and community perspective – including where the impact of the proposals may play out differently in the rural context.

We are not suggesting that other proposals are not relevant to rural areas. We are just concentrating on the proposal we see as most relevant to rural areas from a 'Services' and 'Community' perspective. In this document we set out, where appropriate, what the Government expresses as the main elements of the proposed Bills.

There are numerous 'sub-sections' beneath each of the proposals, including key facts where relevant. Much of the Government's briefing note sets out what the Government has done already or said it intends to do in the policy areas concerned. Details of future actions which do not need legislative change are also articulated in some areas. Generally, we are not reporting those matters in this Rural Lens Review. The Government's Briefing Pack – including details of all the Bills proposed - can be found [HERE](#)

In practice there is relatively little detail given. It will not be possible to fully understand rural impacts (both beneficial and non-beneficial) until the draft bills are presented to Parliament. The RSN will review the Bills at that point "through a rural lens", and where appropriate will fully consult with its members. We must bring to the Government's attention any 'unintended consequences' as we see them.



What does the Bill do?

The National Wealth Fund will work with local partners, including mayors, to bring together a finance and investment offer that supports the needs of local areas and catalyses growth in all corners of the country.

The British Business Bank, which supports SMEs to grow by improving their access to finance, supports £12.4 billion of finance into SMEs, and in 2023 alone funded over 23,000 UK businesses supporting the creation of over 39,000 jobs.

RSN Comment

The proposals must ensure that 'local areas' and 'all corners of the country' include rural areas and that rural needs and opportunities are not masked by focusing on regions or even whole county areas.

A report to be published shortly by the Rural Coalition shows:

- Unmet potential of rural areas worth billions to the UK economy with policies to support growth, rural economies could add £5,000 to £11,000 per worker to current rates of productivity.
- There is a huge cost to the UK economy of "doing nothing". Without support rural productivity will worsen compared to the national average based on current trends.
- Additional Taxes could fund much needed public services. Treasury would expect to see in between £9 billion and £11 billion more in tax receipts. This could pay for over 200,000 teachers or over 170,000 dentists or pay the annual salaries of between 250,000 and half a million NHS nurses.
- Providing the support is a win-win for both the UK as a whole and rural communities and businesses. It is essential that diversification programmes are developed to tackle the structural weaknesses of some rural economies which are over reliant on certain sectors such as the visitor economy.

The report, 'Rural as a region: the hidden challenge for Levelling Up', shows that the Government's Levelling Up White Paper metrics - used to identify the region's most in need of levelling up - are too urban-focused, and do not account for disadvantage in rural economies within regions, often linked to limited local employment prospects, poor transport networks and weak connectivity. It called for the Government to rethink its choice of metrics and include more rural-relevant indicators such as work place based incomes, fuel poverty levels, access to further education and house prices relative to local earnings.

The research, authored by economists from Pragmatix Advisory, sets out that despite being home to a fifth of the population and with a larger total population than London or the South-East, when evaluating all the headline metrics in the white paper against the other nine geographies, England's 'hidden region' of rural, has a greater need to be levelled up than any other part of the country.

SMEs are an important feature of Rural Economies and the support available nationally must reach them.



The Briefing Note states: ***“The current planning regime acts as a major brake on economic growth. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill will play a key role in addressing this constraint, unlocking more housing and infrastructure across the country and supporting sustained economic growth. The planning system must be an enabler of growth – enabling democratic engagement with how, not if, homes and infrastructure are built. Reforming the planning system is key to unlocking our country’s economic growth – enabling us to deliver both the housing and critical infrastructure that communities need. The Bill will speed up and streamline the planning process to build more homes of all tenures and accelerate the delivery of major infrastructure projects in alignment with our industrial, energy, and transport strategies.”***

What does the Bill do?

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill will accelerate housebuilding and infrastructure delivery by:

- Streamlining the delivery process for critical infrastructure including accelerating upgrades to the national grid and boosting renewable energy, which will benefit local communities, unlock delivery of our 2030 clean power mission and net zero obligations, and secure domestic energy security. We will simplify the consenting process for major infrastructure projects and enable relevant, new and improved National Policy Statements to come forward, establishing a review process that provides the opportunity for them to be updated every five years, giving increased certainty to developers and communities.
- Improving local planning decision making by modernising planning committees.
- Increasing local planning authorities’ capacity, to improve performance and decision making, providing a more predictable service to developers and investors.

RSN Comment

It seems likely that there will be a consultation on the proposals relating to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other National Policy Statements and the RSN will consult its members before responding

Funding additional planning officers is very welcomed – but distributing the funding to do so through the current formula will disadvantage rural councils.





The Briefing Note states: ***“In addition to this Bill, we will deliver a genuine living wage that accounts for the cost of living and we will remove the discriminatory age bands to ensure every adult worker benefits. These changes will improve the lives of working people across the country.”***

What does the Bill do?

The briefing note includes commitments to the following:

- Making parental leave, sick pay and protection from unfair dismissal available from day 1 on the job for all workers. We will continue to ensure employers can operate probationary periods to assess new hires.
- Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay by removing the lower earnings limit to make it available to all workers as well as the waiting period.
- Making flexible working the default from day-one for all workers, with employers required to accommodate this as far as is reasonable, to reflect the modern workplace.
- Establishing a Fair Pay Agreement in the adult social care sector and, following review, assess how and to what extent such agreements could benefit other sectors.
- Updating trade union legislation so it is fit for a modern economy, removing unnecessary restrictions on trade union activity – including the previous Government’s approach to minimum service levels – and ensuring industrial relations are based around good faith negotiation and bargaining.

RSN Comment

There will be impacts here for Local Government as a whole, regarding Labour Relations generally.

If the proposals lead to increase costs on local authorities, then the impact will be greater for rural councils given the unfair funding formula which disadvantage rural councils and the communities they serve.

The impact on small to medium sized businesses is a concern in the rural context.





What does the Bill do?

It will give local leaders the tools they need to drive growth by:

- Putting a more ambitious standardised devolution framework into legislation to give local leaders greater powers over the levers of local growth. This will include enhanced powers over strategic planning, local transport networks, skills, and employment support, enabling them to create jobs and improve living standards. We will also introduce new powers and duties for local leaders to produce Local Growth Plans.
- Making devolution the default setting, meaning places will be granted powers without the need to negotiate agreements where they meet the governance conditions. Local leaders will be able to formally request additional powers according to the framework and the Government will be required to consider the request and either devolve them or publicly explain their reasons for not doing so.
- Making it easier to provide devolved powers quickly to more areas through establishing a simpler process for creating new Combined and Combined County Authorities, to ensure that every part of England can rapidly benefit from devolution. The Bill will establish a legislative foundation upon which to widen and deepen devolution, with a weighting towards creating advanced mayoral settlements where there is the capacity and ambition to do so.
- Improving and unblocking local decision making through more effective governance arrangements, ensuring mayors and Combined Authorities can get on and deliver for their areas.
- Empowering local communities with a strong new 'right to buy' for valued community assets, such as empty shops, pubs and community spaces. This will help to revamp high streets and end the blight of empty premises.

RSN Comment

The empowering local communities, proposals are welcome.

This new Bill will make “devolution the default setting”, which means that local leaders will not have to negotiate new powers, as long as they “meet the Government conditions”. This ought to make it easier for areas to gain devolution powers, although some will still find the conditions to be unacceptable (e.g. a mayor or governor). The RSN will await sight of the Bill before commenting further at this stage but in principle making it easier to provide devolved powers quickly to more areas is to be welcomed.

Pixel comments: “It brings the potential for a consistent tier of local government covering the whole of England. At some point, this will have to be recognised in the local government funding system, with combined authorities either fully integrated into it, or with their own separate system”

Before the 17th July the Secretary of State issued an invitation to those areas without a devolution deal to make submissions by the end of September 2024.



What does the Bill do?

The Bill will put power over services back in the hands of the communities that depend on them, and will provide the powers necessary to deliver the Government's 5-point plan to build better bus networks across England:

- Allowing every community to take back control of their buses by removing barriers that currently limit bus franchising powers only to metro mayors.
- Accelerating the bus franchising process by supporting local leaders to deliver better buses, faster.
- Supporting public ownership by removing the ban on publicly owned bus companies and building on the success of award-winning public bus services still in operation.
- Stepping in to safeguard local bus networks by providing more accountability over bus operators and ensuring standards are raised wherever you live across the country.
- Empowering local transport authorities and reforming funding by giving local leaders more control and flexibility over bus funding and allowing them to plan ahead to deliver their local transport priorities.

RSN Comment

It is difficult to see how a Bill can be introduced without consultation with local authorities and bus companies.

Franchising seems to be an option rather than a requirement.

It will be essential to see the financial support proposals for local authorities. Bus service support is a discretionary service not a mandatory one. Bus support has been cut over the years in rural areas as funding has been transferred to meet the costs of statutory services – especially adult and children's social care.

Urban Councils receive more government grant than rural and budget to spend 3.5 times more per head on public transport.





CRIME AND POLICING BILL

What does the Bill do?

The Bill will include measures to:

- Rebuild neighbourhood policing. Bring forward arrangements to get neighbourhood police and Police Community Support Officers back on the beat in local communities.
- Crackdown on anti-social behaviour
- Introduce new Respect Orders to tackle persistent adult offenders, fast-track Public Spaces Protection Orders to make it quicker and easier to clamp down on rapid escalations in street drinking, and new powers to tackle the dangerous and anti-social use of off-road bikes.
- Create a duty for local partners to co-operate to tackle anti-social behaviour, with an anti-social behaviour lead in every local authority area.

RSN Comment

It is essential that the phrase “*in local communities*” includes rural communities.

Smaller Rural Towns serve the same economic and social purposes as larger towns.

Anti-social behaviour in small rural towns needs addressing too.

CHILDREN'S WELL BEING BILL



What does the Bill do?

The Bill will include measures to:

- Keep children safe, happy and rooted in their communities and schools by strengthening multi-agency child protection and safeguarding arrangements.
- Require free breakfast clubs in every primary school to ensure that every child, no matter their circumstances, is well prepared for the school day and can achieve their full potential.

RSN Comment

The logistics (including staffing and premises related) of smaller rural primary schools running breakfast clubs will not be without its challenges.

The rural context must be **fully** taken into account.



What does the Bill do?

The Bill establishes Great British Energy which will:

- Develop, own and operate assets, investing in partnership with the private sector. It will have a capitalisation of £8.3 billion of new money over the Parliament. Through these investments, Great British Energy will take a stake for the British people in projects and supply chains which accelerate technologies of the future, reaping benefits at home in cheap clean power and securing Britain at the front of the global race for technology which has major global export potential.
- Facilitate, encourage and participate in the production, distribution, storage and supply of clean energy, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from energy produced from fossil fuels as well as measures for furthering the transition to clean energy and improving energy efficiency.

The Bill gives the Secretary of State the ability to provide Great British Energy with the financial backing needed for it to meet its aims and ambitions. The Secretary of State will be required to prepare a strategic priorities statement for Great British Energy, to ensure it focuses its efforts on Government priorities.

The Bill builds on the immediate work by the Energy Secretary to deliver the Government's mission to achieve clean energy by 2030, including scrapping the ban on onshore windfarms and appointing Chris Stark - the former chair of the Climate Change Committee - to lead the Mission Control for 2030.

RSN Comment

Although not mentioned in the Briefing Document Labour has previously said that this will be used as a vehicle to partner communities and local community owned, renewable energy schemes.





The Briefing Note states: **“Skills England will support economic growth by greater coherence to the assessment of skills needs and training landscape; ensuring training programmes are well designed and delivered to meet these needs; and that regional and national skills systems are providing the skilled workforce needed to enable businesses to thrive and to contribute to the Industrial Strategy at the heart of our growth mission.”**

What does the Bill do?

- Skills England will convene employers, unions, education and training providers, and experts with national government to:
- Develop a single picture of national and local skills needs. Skills England will work with industry, the Migration Advisory Committee, unions and the Industrial Strategy Council to build and maintain a comprehensive assessment of current and future skills needs. This will also inform the Department for Education’s policy priorities.
- Identify the training for which the Growth and Skills Levy will be accessible - this includes consulting on (and maintaining a list of) levy-eligible training to ensure value for money, and that the mix of government-funded training available to learners and employers aligns with skills needs.
- Ensure that the national and regional skills systems are meeting skills needs and are aligned, including using local and regional vacancy data as part of a robust evidence base.
- Skills England will convene Mayoral Combined Authorities and other key stakeholders to identify system issues and provide advice to Government, leading to a more coherent system.

RSN Comment

It is essential that the skills needs of rurally based businesses (including SME’s) are reflected in these proposals and that skills support and training are delivered locally.

Affordable access to post 16 education and training is a long-standing rural issue especially given the paucity of public transport options.

The RSN will review the Industrial Strategy when it is published.



NB: THOSE SHADED ARE THE ONES SPECIFICALLY REFERRED TO IN THIS RSN RURAL LENS REVIEW

ECONOMIC STABILITY AND GROWTH

Budget Responsibility Bill

National Wealth Fund Bill

Pension Schemes Bill

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

Employment Rights Bill

English Devolution Bill

Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill

Better Buses Bill

Railways Bill

Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill

Arbitration Bill

Product Safety and Metrology Bill

Digital Information and Smart Data Bill

High Speed Rail (Crewe to Manchester) Bill.

Draft Audit Reform and Corporate Governance Bill

GREAT BRITISH ENERGY AND CLEAN ENERGY SUPERPOWER

Great British Energy Bill

The Crown Estate Bill

Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Revenue Support Mechanism) Bill

Water (Special Measures) Bill

NB: THOSE SHADED ARE THE ONES SPECIFICALLY REFERRED TO IN THIS RSN RURAL LENS REVIEW

SECURE BORDERS, CRACKING DOWN ON ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND TAKEBACK OUR STREETS

Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

Crime and Policing Bill

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill

Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill

BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY

Children's Wellbeing Bill

Skills England Bill

Renters' Rights Bill

Football Governance Bill

Draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill

Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill

Draft Conversion Practices Bill

HEALTH

Tobacco and Vapes Bill

Mental Health Bill

NATIONAL SECURITY AND SERVING THE COUNTRY

Hillsborough Law

Armed Forces Commissioner Bill

Northern Ireland Legacy Legislation

House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill

Cyber Security and Resilience Bill

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Bill

Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (Extension) Bill