

# RURAL LENS REVIEW



## The Queen's Speech 2022

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# At a glance



## Rural Services Network's thoughts on the **Queen's Speech 2022.**

- Overall, across the 38 Bills referred to, there is little in the Queen's Speech that appears to directly address issues of concern to rural people and communities, as opposed to urban ones.
- There are a number of proposals which will impact on Local Government generally. These include a Non-Domestic Rating Bill (cutting the revaluation cycle from five to three years from 2023); the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill; Housing Bills on Tenants Rights and Improving the Private Rented Sector; Support to Home-Schooling Families an Energy Bill and a Procurement Bill.
- No sign of any real commitment from Government towards rural public transport furthering the anger of non-approval of Bus Service Improvement Plans across many rural areas.
- In terms of “accelerating the rollout of broadband in the coming years, to enable faster and more reliable connectivity for more of the population. By 2025 the Government is aiming for a minimum of 85 per cent gigabit-capable coverage” this is not new.
- There is nothing mentioned to address the need to improve the resilience of the rural electrical distribution system ahead of net-zero targets, but it may be helpful to have in place a new ‘Future System Operator’ that could. There is no mention of improving insulation of ‘hard to treat’ properties.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The note below is intended as a briefing note on the main points of relevance in the Queen's Speech and the Government's more detailed Briefing Pack from a rural perspective.

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 at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/queens-speech-2022-background-briefing-notes>

### **The proposed Bills we are including in this Rural Lens Review are:**

1. Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill
2. Schools Bill
3. Transport Bill
4. Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill
5. Energy Security Bill
6. Procurement Bill
7. Higher Education Bill
8. Draft Mental Health Act Reform Bill
9. Financial Services and Markets Bill

## THE BILLS PROPOSED WITH PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO RURAL AREAS

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### 1. Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

“A bill will be brought forward to drive local growth, empowering local leaders to regenerate their areas, and ensuring everyone can share in the United Kingdom’s success. The planning system will be reformed to give residents more involvement in local development.”

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Placing a duty on the Government to set Levelling Up missions and produce an annual report updating the country on delivery of these missions.
- Creating a new model of combined authority: the ‘County Deal’ which will provide local leaders with powers to enhance local accountability, join up services and provide transparent decision making to rejuvenate their communities, increase their ability to reflect local preferences in arrangements including directly elected leaders’ titles.
- Unlocking new powers for local authorities to bring empty premises back into use and instigate rental auctions of vacant commercial properties in town centres and on high streets.
- Giving residents more of a say over changing street names and ensuring everyone can continue to benefit from al fresco dining.
- Strengthening neighbourhood planning and digitalising the system to make local plans easier to find, understand and engage with; by making it easier for local authorities to get local plans in place, we will limit speculative development.

### RSN COMMENTS ON LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL

#### Levelling Up

There is no new information here. It was all set out in the Levelling Up White Paper. See the RSN Critique of that White Paper at <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-lens-review-of-levelling-up-white-paper>.

In terms of the statement “Capturing more of the financial value created by development with a locally set, non-negotiable levy to deliver the infrastructure that communities need, such as housing, schools, GPs and new roads” this is to replace Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds. There must be full consultation before measures are adopted so that we can judge what the impact on rural areas and on rural affordable housing might be.

A Commitment to a Community Led Local Development (CLLD) programme, on the lines of the previous LEADER approach should be included. This should fill the gap left by the Common Agricultural Policy’s EAFRD strand of funding to rural communities, but should also focus on social and community infrastructure as well as support for micro- businesses.

### **High Street Empty Properties**

Until there is more detail available it is difficult to comment. It is expressed as a power rather than a new duty. No mention of how the Councils costs will be covered. Capacity issues in rural councils.

### **Planning**

Again, the devil will be in the detail. We need:

- A Renewed commitment to community-led Neighbourhood Planning with the resources to enable all rural communities to engage in their development. Only time will tell what is meant by “strengthening neighbourhood planning”
- A renewed commitment to support provision of affordable housing initiatives in all rural areas. There needs to be a revision of the definition of affordability to reflect local incomes and house prices.
- Commitment to a comprehensive England land-use strategy. This should be consistent with Government’s direction on net-zero, food security and biodiversity, whilst also ensuring that all rural communities (including those in designated landscapes) can provide housing and jobs for their next generation.

## 2. Schools Bill

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Strengthening the regulatory framework for academy trusts and establishing new statutory standards to drive clarity and consistency of expectations for academy trusts, underpinned by intervention powers to ensure action can be taken to tackle serious failure if it occurs.
- Supporting more schools to become academies in strong trusts by removing barriers to conversion for faith schools and grammar schools and bringing schools into the academy sector where this is requested by local authorities.
- Enabling better, more targeted, and more consistent multi-agency support to the children and families who need it most across England by making necessary reforms to the attendance legal framework. The Bill will require schools to publish an attendance policy and will put attendance guidance on a statutory footing, making roles and responsibilities clearer.
- Implementing a direct National Funding Formula, so that each mainstream school will be allocated funding on the same basis, wherever it is in the country, and every child will be given the same opportunities, based on a consistent assessment of their needs.
- Establishing ‘children not in school’ registers, as well as creating a duty on local authorities to provide support to home educating families. This will provide accurate data to help identify children who are not receiving a safe or suitable full-time education, and to enable support to be offered to interested parents of registered children.
- Improving safeguarding by expanding registration requirements for independent educational institutions, enhancing enforcement, and working with Ofsted to expand investigatory powers.
- Strengthening the current teacher misconduct regime to include more educational institutions and increasing powers to investigate individuals who commit misconduct and enact appropriate regulatory discipline procedures.

### RSN COMMENTS ON SCHOOLS BILL

The impact on rural schools of the proposed National Funding Formula will need to be assessed.

There must be recognition of the excellent results achieved by small rural schools and commitment to retaining and supporting this without 'levelling-down' funding to pay for improvements in other areas.

### 3. Transport Bill

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Providing a new body, Great British Railways, with the powers it needs to act as the single national leader of the railways, with clear lines of accountability for decision-making and joined-up leadership to deliver a customer-focused railway, including by improving accessibility and promoting open data. Great British Railways will work within a clear mandate, goals and budgets set by the Government, who will reserve powers of direction.
- Transferring contracting powers for passenger services to Great British Railways, and ensuring we retain the best of the private sector by expanding its role under the new model, introducing new passenger service contracts focussed on getting the trains running punctually and reliably.
- Introducing new laws that safely enable self-driving and remotely operated vehicles and vessels, support the roll-out of electric vehicle charge points and enabling the licensing of London pedicabs.

### RSN COMMENTS ON TRANSPORT BILL

The proposal to enabling the installation of more electric vehicle charge points throughout the UK is welcomed but must include rural areas

No sign of any real commitment from Government towards rural public transport furthering the anger of non-approval of Bus Service Improvement Plans across many rural areas.



#### 4. Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Bill

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Requiring manufacturers, importers and distributors of smart devices to comply with minimum security standards. The legislation also imposes duties on these businesses to investigate and take action in cases of non-compliance.
- Providing a robust regulatory framework that can adapt and keep pace with rapid technological advances, techniques used by cyber criminals, hostile states and broader global regulation.
- Reforming the Electronic Communications Code to support faster, fairer and more collaborative negotiations for the use of private and public land to enable deployment of telecommunications networks.

##### **RSN COMMENTS ON PRODUCT SECURITY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE BILL**

In terms of “accelerating the rollout of broadband in the coming years, to enable faster and more reliable connectivity for more of the population. By 2025 the Government is aiming for a minimum of 85 per cent gigabit-capable coverage” this is not new.

Government must urgently come up with proposal for the hard and very hard to reach places – most of which are rural. Indeed, there should be increased impetus behind the Government’s existing commitment to Project Gigabit – fixed broadband, 4G and 5G – to create an environment in which rural areas can fully benefit.

#### 5. Energy Security Bill

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Introducing state-of-the-art business models for Carbon Capture Usage and Storage transport and storage, low carbon hydrogen and industrial carbon capture which will fire the starting gun on new, low-carbon technologies.
- Supporting industry to step up investment in growing the consumer market for electric heat pumps by providing for a new market standard and trading scheme. This will support innovation and help to lower the costs of heat pumps over time.

- Appointing Ofgem as the new regulator for heat networks, ensuring consumers get a fair price and a reliable supply of heat.
- Enabling the first ever large-scale hydrogen heating trial, allowing us to inform the role of hydrogen in heat decarbonisation in 2026.
- Establishing a new Future System Operator, providing strategic oversight across electricity and gas systems. It will drive progress towards net zero, energy security and minimising consumer costs.

### RSN COMMENTS ON ENERGY SECURITY BILL

There is nothing mentioned to address the need to improve the resilience of the rural electrical distribution system ahead of net-zero targets, but it may be helpful to have in place a new 'Future System Operator' that could. There is no mention of improving insulation of 'hard to treat' properties.

## 6. Procurement Bill

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Enshrining in law the objectives of public procurement including: delivering value for money, maximising public benefit, treating suppliers equally and without discrimination, and acting, and being seen to act, with integrity.
- Requiring buyers to have regard to the Government's strategic priorities for public procurement as set out in the National Procurement Policy Statement.
- Introducing new, clearer arrangements for how contracting authorities can buy at pace if necessary to protect life or health, public order or safety, with strengthened safeguards for transparency.
- Tackling unacceptable behaviour and poor performance through new exclusion rules and giving buyers the tools, they need to properly take account of a bidder's past performance.

- Providing a number of sector-specific features where necessary, including tailored rules to better suit defence and security procurement in order to protect our national interests.
- Reforming the Single Source Contract Regulations to ensure we continue to pay fair prices on single source defence contracts while providing value for money.

### **RSN COMMENTS ON PROCUREMENT BILL**

#### **In principle we support the aims of:**

- Giving public sector buyers more freedom and flexibility by allowing them to better negotiate with suppliers and to design the buying process to meet the needs of their specific procurement.
- Making it easier, especially for small and medium-sized businesses, to bid for public sector contracts; and
- Enabling smaller contracts to be restricted to UK suppliers, as permitted by World Trade Organisation rules, and ensuring that procurement activities aid jobs and innovation.
- Retention of social value is needed as a key factor in both local and central Government procurement and commitment to interpret this concept in a way that ensures a level playing field between large scale outsourcing companies and local voluntary organisations.

As always, the devil will be in the detail.

## **7. Higher Education Bill**

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Ensuring that appropriate fee limits can be applied more flexibly to higher education study within the Lifelong Loan Entitlement and that they can be effectively regulated.
- Subject to the conclusion of the higher education reform consultation:

- setting minimum qualification requirements for a person living in England to be eligible to get student finance support to enter higher education, helping to ensure students can pursue the best post-18 education and training options for them by taking pathways through which they can excel; and
- fulfilling the manifesto commitment to tackle uncontrolled growth of low- quality courses by taking specific powers to control numbers of students entering higher education at specific providers in England.

### **RSN COMMENTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION BILL**

**The purpose of the Bill is, of course, supported.**

The reality in rural areas is that there are issues relating to Further Education that need to be addressed: for rural young people three linked issues need addressing – travel options to access FE, the cost of that travel and the choice of institutions/courses available. Students aged 17 or 18 should be entitled to statutory free travel to FE colleges or schools, matching the existing scheme for those aged up to 16. This scheme should be fully funded by central Government.

## **8. Draft Mental Health Act Reform Bill**

The **main elements** of the draft Bill are:

- Amending the definition of mental disorder so that people can no longer be detained solely because they have a learning disability or because they are autistic.
- Changing the criteria needed to detain people, so that the Act is only used where strictly necessary: where the person is a genuine risk to their own safety or that of others, and where there is a clear therapeutic benefit.
- Giving patients better support, including offering everyone the option of an independent mental health advocate, and allowing patients to choose their own ‘nominated person’, rather than have a ‘nearest relative’ assigned for them.
- Introducing a 28-day time-limit for transfers from prison to hospital for acutely ill prisoners and ending the temporary use of prison for those awaiting assessment or treatment.

- Introducing a new form of supervised community discharge. This will allow the discharge of restricted patients into the community, with the necessary care and supervision to adequately and appropriately manage their risk.
- Increasing the frequency with which patients can make appeals to Tribunals on their detention and provide Tribunals with a power to recommend that aftercare services are put in place.
- Introducing a statutory care and treatment plan for all patients in detention. This will be written with the patient and will set out a clear pathway to discharge.

#### **RSN COMMENTS DRAFT MENTAL HEALTH ACT REFORM BILL**

In rural areas a main issue is access to local support and assistance in a timely manner.

### **9. Financial Services and Markets Bill**

The **main elements** of the Bill are:

- Ensuring that people across the UK continue to be able to access their own cash with ease.

#### **RSN COMMENTS ON FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS BILL**

We are very pleased to see Access to Cash included in the legislative programme. The proposals may not deal with many of the other problems rural people and businesses are having over banking.

Legislation must be introduced without further delay to avoid an irreversible hollowing of the UK's cash infrastructure that leaves communities unable to withdraw or deposit cash.

Legislation must ensure that existing schemes and infrastructure, such as the LINK ATM network and the Post Office, are fit for purpose and able to fully support cash access through free to use withdrawal and deposit services for years to come.

The overall number of free-to-use ATMs across the UK has fallen by 23% since 2018, rising to a fall of more than 50% in some areas. Failure to act swiftly will leave millions of consumers and businesses unable to access cash in line with their need, particularly those in rural, remote and suburban communities.