

Relevant parts of the government's legislative programme for 2015/16 announced in the Queen's speech 2015

Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill

The Bill will provide a generic and enabling legislative framework to deliver the Greater Manchester devolution deal and other subsequent devolution deals in larger cities and "other places" which have chosen to have directly elected mayors.

Housing Bill

Gives housing association tenants the chance to own their own home through an extension of the Right to Buy scheme:

- Enabling the extension of Right to Buy levels of discount to housing association tenants.
- Requiring local authorities to dispose of high-value vacant council houses, to help fund the Right to Buy extension discounts and the building of more affordable homes in the area.
- Providing the necessary statutory framework to support the delivery of Starter Homes.
- Taking forward the Right to Build, requiring local planning authorities to support custom and self-builders registered in their area in identifying suitable plots of land to build or commission their own home
- Introducing a statutory register for brownfield land, to help achieve the target of getting Local Development Orders in place on 90% of suitable brownfield sites by 2020.
- Simplifying and speeding up the neighbourhood planning system, to support communities that seek to meet local housing and other development needs through neighbourhood planning.
- Giving effect to other changes to housing and planning legislation that would support housing growth.

Energy Bill

Transfers primary decision-making powers for onshore wind farm consents to local authorities.

Enterprise Bill

- The Bill will extend the government's "Red Tape Challenge" to include independent regulators such as the Financial Conduct Authority and Ofgem and to require them to report against compliance with existing statutory better regulation requirements.
- Extend the primary authority scheme whereby businesses are able to seek advice on regulation from a single local authority whose advice must be accepted by all other local authorities.
- Establish a Small Business Conciliation Services to hand business-to-business disputes without the need for court action including on late payment.
- Capping public sector exit payments to "end six-figure pay offs".
- Business rates' appeals reform including modifying the Valuation Tribunal powers to consider ratepayers appeals.

- Allowing for the Valuation Office Agency to share information with local authorities to improve service delivery for both local government and rate payers.

The exact level at which public sector exit payments will be capped has not been decided – indications from Chancellor George Osborne it is likely to be about £95,000; though it is unlikely this will be on the face of the primary legislation, rather it will be set out in regulations or a written order. According to the latest Treasury figures, 1,838 public sector employees received payouts over £100,000 in 2013. The proposed reform comes after the coalition government introduced rules to allow for any exit payments made to public sector workers to be reclaimed if they return to work in the same area within twelve months.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has welcomed the extension of the [primary authority scheme](#) which will not only increase consistency for businesses, but also help councils to target their limited resources. There are now around 1,500 businesses that have entered into Primary Authority agreements, covering areas of regulation such as trading standards and environmental health. It is understood that the extension of the scheme, which is relatively new, will involve covering fire safety and age-related sales of alcohol.

The proposed reforms to business rate appeals and moves to allow the Valuation Office Agency to share information with local authorities should be seen together as to help tackle the backlog and speed up appeals. The LGA is concerned about the number of speculative appeals, which causes financial uncertainty for councils. Sharing of information and providing greater transparency on what basis ratings have been made may help to address that. A [consultation](#) last year proposed making improvements to the operation of the appeals process by providing greater transparency in how rateable values are established, requiring ratepayers to provide an explanation with a formal challenge, and introducing a formal separation between the proposal stage and appeal stage.

European Union Referendum Bill

To enable an ‘in-out’ referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union before the end of 2017. Given the breadth of EU obligations affecting local authorities and the significant funding the sector receives from the EU, notably through the European Structural and Investment Funds, the LGA has been calling for “a more robust, closer, structured involvement from the outset with government departments on EU issues involving the sector, including in any renegotiation of powers.”

Extremism Bill

Provides a new power (Closure Orders) for local authorities and law enforcement to close down premises used to support extremism.

Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill

- The Bill will freeze for two years from 2016-17 the main rates of the majority of working age benefits, tax credits and child benefit, excluding pensions, disability payments, maternity, paternity and adoption pay.
- Lower the benefits cap so that that total amount of benefits a non-working family can receive in a year from £26,000 to £23,000.
- Introduce duties on the government to report annually on progress on their commitments to achieving full employment, creating 3 million new apprenticeships and on the Troubled Families programme.

The purpose of the Bill is two pronged – focused on both the cost of the UK welfare benefits system as well as the government's full employment ambitions (in achieving the highest employment rate in the G7). The savings brought about by lowering the benefits cap will release additional funding to create three million new apprenticeships.

In addition, the government is proposing to put in place a new Youth Allowance for 18-21 year olds with work related conditionality from day one of receiving the benefit. After six months they will be required to go on an apprenticeship training or community work placement, together with providing Job Centre plus advice support in schools across England to supplement careers advice. The government is also proposing to remove the automatic entitlement to housing support for 18-21 year olds.