

King's Speech 2024

A PAGEFIELD SUMMARY

Overview

Sir Keir Starmer today laid out his ambition to “take the brakes off Britain” as King Charles unveiled a package of 40 legislative bills aimed at boosting economic growth and improving living standards.

In Labour’s first legislative programme for 14 years, Starmer outlined a wide-ranging set of priorities that largely reflected the Party’s election manifesto commitments. As anticipated, the majority of the measures focused on driving economic growth and devolving powers away from Whitehall.

The Prime Minister warned that his Government’s plans to rebuild the country would not happen overnight, but promised that the legislative package announced by the King today set out a “clear destination” for the UK.

The King’s Speech, which contained legislation on issues ranging from house-building and railways to the NHS, is an opportunity for Starmer’s Labour to capitalise on its landslide election victory.

Headline bills announced today include legislation aimed at delivering Labour’s long-promised planning reforms, creation of Great British Energy and Great British Railways, and the party’s alternative to the Rwanda scheme.

Please see below for a summary of everything announced in today’s King’s Speech and a line on what each piece of legislation seeks to achieve.

A new legislative agenda

Economic stability and growth

- Budget Responsibility Bill – A bill to ensure any Government making significant and permanent tax and spending changes will be subject to an independent assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), reinforcing market credibility and public trust.
- National Wealth Fund Bill – While the fund can be created outside legislation, the bill will put it on a permanent statutory footing. The fund will simplify the UK's fragmented landscape of support for businesses and investors, aligning critical institutions like the UK Infrastructure Bank and British Business Bank.
- Pension Schemes Bill – A bill to support over 15 million people who save in private-sector pension schemes get better outcomes from their pension assets and support the Government's mission to deliver growth.
- Planning and Infrastructure Bill – A bill that will make improvements to the planning system at a local level, modernising planning committees and increasing local planning authorities' capacity to deliver an improved service – the aim being to boost housebuilding.
- Employment Rights Bill – This bill will create a new partnership between business, trade unions and working people. It 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.
- English Devolution Bill – A bill to establish a new framework for English devolution, moving power out of Westminster and back to those who know their areas best. It will give local leaders (such as Mayors) the tools they need to drive growth.
- Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill – This bill will allow the Government to deliver its manifesto commitment to bring rail services back into public ownership, to improve passenger journeys and deliver on the mission to drive growth.
- Better Buses Bill – A bill to give local communities throughout England the power to take back control of their bus services. It will give local leaders the tools they need to deliver better bus networks, reflecting the needs of the local communities that rely on them.
- Railways Bill – This bill will establish Great British Railway and see the delivery of legislation to create a unified and simplified rail system that relentlessly focuses on improving services for passengers, delivering better value for money for taxpayers and, ending years of fragmentation and waste.
- Bank Resolution (Recapitalisation) Bill – A bill to enhance the UK's resolution regime, providing the Bank of England with a more flexible toolkit to respond to the failure of small banks.

Economic stability and growth (continued...)

- Arbitration Bill – This bill will support more efficient dispute resolution, attract international legal business, and promote UK economic growth. It enacts recommendations by the Law Commission.
- Product Safety and Metrology Bill – A bill to preserve the UK's status as a global leader in product regulation, supporting businesses and protecting consumers. It will ensure the UK is better placed to address modern day safety issues, harness opportunities that deliver economic growth, and ensure a level playing field between the high street and online marketplaces.
- Digital Information and Smart Data Bill – This bill will enable new uses of data to be safely developed and deployed, and will improve people's lives by making public services work better by reforming data sharing and standards; help researchers make more life enhancing discoveries; and ensure data is well protected by giving the regulator (the ICO) new, stronger powers and a more modern structure.
- High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill - A bill aimed to driving economic growth and productivity by providing powers to construct and operate rail infrastructure that is key to improving inter-regional and northern rail connectivity.
- Draft Audit Reform and Corporate Governance Bill - A bill to replace the Financial Reporting Council with a new regulator - the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority - with the powers it needs to tackle bad financial reporting and build public trust.

Great British Energy and clean energy superpower

- Great British Energy Bill - A bill to establish Great British Energy - a new, publicly-owned energy production company which will own, manage and operate clean power projects up and down the country.
- The Crown Estate Bill - A bill aimed at modernising The Crown Estate by removing outdated restrictions on its activities, widening its investment powers and giving it the powers to borrow in order to invest at a faster pace.
- Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Revenue Support Mechanism) - A bill designed to support sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production in the UK by providing revenue certainty to encourage investment in the construction of SAF plants across the UK.
- Water (Special Measures) Bill - A bill aimed at delivering on Labour's manifesto commitment to put water companies under tough special measures by strengthening regulation and beginning the work of cleaning up the UK's rivers, lakes and seas.

Secure borders, cracking down on anti social behaviour and take back our streets

- Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill - A bill to replace the previous Conservative government's Rwanda scheme, enabling stronger borders and a properly controlled and managed asylum by giving the new Border Security Command and wider law enforcement the tools and powers they need to crack down on criminal gangs, providing a strong deterrent and penalty for criminals involved organised immigration crime (OIC), and fixing the broken asylum system.
- Crime and Policing Bill - A bill containing measures to rebuild neighbourhood policing, deliver higher policing standards, crackdown on antisocial behaviour, tackle retail crime and knife crime, and provide a stronger, specialist response to violence against women and girls.
- Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill - A bill requiring those responsible for certain premises and events to take steps to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack and reduce harm in the event of a terrorist attack occurring.
- Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill - A bill to deliver Labour's manifesto commitment to deliver a justice system that gives victims the justice system they deserve and ensure victims of crime and antisocial behaviour get the support they deserve.



Break down the barriers to opportunity

- Children's Wellbeing Bill - A bill designed to put children and their wellbeing at the centre of the education and children's social care systems, and make changes so they are safe, healthy, happy and treated fairly.
- Skills England Bill - A bill to transfer functions from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) to Skills England, which will sit at the heart of a system that provides learners with the skills required to thrive in life, businesses with the trained workforce they need to succeed, and local areas with access to the right skills to spur economic growth.
- Renters' Rights Bill - A bill to give greater rights and protections to people renting their homes, including no-fault evictions and reforming grounds for possession.
- Football Governance Bill - A bill to establish an independent football regulator to ensure greater sustainability in the sector and strengthen protections for fans, delivering on Labour's manifesto commitment to introduce an Independent Football Regulator.
- Draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill - A draft bill to implement the provisions of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024, further reforming the leasehold system by tackling unregulated and unaffordable ground rents.
- Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill - A draft bill to enshrine in law the full right to equal pay for ethnic minorities and disabled people and to introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting.
- Draft Conversion Practices Bill - A draft bill to bring forward a full, trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices.

Health

- Tobacco and Vapes Bill - A bill to introduce a progressive smoking ban that will increase the age at which people can buy cigarettes, and impose limits on the sale and marketing of vapes.
- Mental Health Bill - A bill to modernise the Mental Health Act 1983 so it is fit for the 21st century, ensuring that patients have greater choice, autonomy, rights and support throughout treatment.

National security and serving the country

- Hillsborough Law - A bill to introduce a duty of candour for public servants and authorities.
- Armed Forces Commissioner Bill - A bill to establish a statutory Armed Forces Commissioner to act as an independent champion for the Armed Forces and their families.
- Northern Ireland Legacy Legislation - Legislation will be brought forward to begin the process of repealing and replacing the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.
- House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill - A bill to modernise the constitution including a reform of the House of Lords to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the Lords.
- Cyber Security and Resilience Bill - A bill to strengthen the UK's defences and ensure that more essential digital services are protected.
- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Bill - A bill to enable the Government to treat the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in a manner comparable to that of an international organisation of which the UK is a member.
- Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (Extension) Bill - A bill to extend the provision of legislation to ensure that female bishops can enter the House of Lords sooner than they otherwise would, to support efforts to increase the number of female bishops in the Lords.
- Holocaust Memorial Bill - A bill to support the building of a national Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, next to the Houses of Parliament.



Stakeholder reaction

Political

- Sir Ed Davey, Leader of the Liberal Democrats - “The Liberal Democrats will carefully scrutinise the government’s plans, striving hard to stand up for our constituents. We will continue campaigning to fix the NHS, boosting GP numbers, tackling delays to cancer treatment and improving access to dentists and pharmacies. We will make sure the voice of carers is heard, from increasing the Carer’s Allowance to the big challenge of fixing social care - so that our loved ones can get the support they need.”
- Anas Sarwar, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party - “From GB energy, headquartered right here in Scotland to bring down bills and deliver jobs, to making work pay with the New Deal for Working People, this is a programme of change that will deliver for Scotland. This Labour government will grow our economy, start the work of rebuilding public services, and deliver for working people - ushering in a decade of national renewal.”
- Carla Denyer, co-leader of the Green Party - “Lots to welcome and huge relief it’s not another deliberately divisive Tory list... But needs to be bolder to meet huge challenges, e.g. water in public hands, nature restoration, safe routes for asylum, rent controls & end to cruel 2-child benefit cap.”
- Stephen Flynn, SNP leader at Westminster - “Keir Starmer has failed his first test in government. This timid legislative programme is a missed opportunity that failed to deliver the change that people in Scotland were promised. People in Scotland voted for clear and substantial change at Westminster, and the Labour government was handed a huge mandate to deliver it, so it’s bitterly disappointing that they have thrown that opportunity away.”
- Liz Truss, former Prime Minister and Conservative MP for South West Norfolk - “[Starmer’s King’s Speech] expands the power of the unelected state and increases red tape on families and businesses. The bad policies include: giving more powers to a failed OBR; reintroducing Stalinist housing targets rather than a zoning system; more government involvement in rail and energy, driving up costs; a conversion therapy ban which will be misused by gender ideologues; a counterproductive and unconservative smoking ban.”
- Paul Nowak, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) - “This King’s Speech begins the process of repairing and rebuilding Britain after 14 years of chaos and decline. Whether its boosting workers’ rights, launching GB Energy or bringing our railways back into public ownership - this is a serious statement of intent. Working people need – and want – a government that will deliver meaningful change and be on their side.”
- Hannah Peaker, Director of Policy at left-of-centre think tank the New Economics Foundation - “It’s welcome that the government wants to build a strong economy for the benefit of our people and public services, but it’s at risk of getting tied up in strict spending rules that’ll make this near impossible. It was a failure to invest in our people, public services, and national infrastructure that caused our economy to stall. Further stagnation would mean less tax revenue for the government to spend, with our schools and hospitals crumbling as a result.”

- Shaun Spiers, Executive Director at think tank Green Alliance - “The government should show that it takes seriously the impact of new energy infrastructure on much loved landscapes, issues that shaped many local campaigns for newly elected MPs. The new team at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should also be ready to talk with the rest of Whitehall. Many departments will want to see planning rules relaxed, but MHCLG ministers must assert environmental principles in these discussions from the outset, working to find solutions that facilitate development while protecting the environment.”
- Mick Lynch, General Secretary of the RMT - “We welcome today's announcements specifically around removing restrictions on trade unions, the New Deal for workers and the rolling out of public ownership of our railways. These achievements are down to pressure from the trade union movement, and we will continue to articulate what is in the best interests of railway workers and working people as a whole. We will also continue to actively engage with the government on the pay issues in our sectors which can be resolved quickly.”

Media

- Beth Rigby, Political Editor at Sky News - “A King's Speech with no surprises. Starmer sticks to what he promised in election. His pledge is to be a ‘govt of service’. ‘The fight for trust the battle that defines our political era’. All about economic growth, devolution & delivering on his 6 ‘missions’.”
- Henry Zeffman, Chief Political Correspondent at the BBC - “What may prove some of the most contentious measures - the planning and infrastructure bill, and the English devolution bill - are both aimed at driving growth. But legislation is only part of a government’s job. The prime minister and his ministers will have to respond rapidly to unexpected events, as well as making decisions on issues ranging from public sector pay to universities to water companies to council finances. One of the questions for this government is whether they can ensure events do not blow their focus on growth off course.”
- Harry Cole, Political Editor at The Sun - “The new PM's first King's Speech touches on almost every walk of life; from transport, to energy, to school uniforms and what you can eat, drink or smoke.... It's a worrying sign that the first chance he got, the Labour leader announced he is tearing up reams of trade union reforms that stopped militants grinding the country to a halt at the drop of hat. And while employment rights laws sound cuddly, beware of the small print that business warns could tie them up in new red tape and see working from home massively expanded.”
- Sophy Ridge, lead politics presenter at Sky News - “The King's Speech talks about devolution but for my money the key message is a more centralised and interventionist Government, that's prepared to be muscular pushing through planning/housebuilding, nationalising rail companies, a national curriculum & Government-owned energy company.”
- Lewis Goodall, presenter on ‘The News Agents’ podcast - “No surprises in the King's Speech (there rarely are). Re-emphasises two things a) this government will live or die on its theory that supply side measures in the economy can quickly boost growth b) that we have the most reflexively interventionist government for decades.”

- Zoe Kleinman, Technology Editor at BBC News - “This is the first time in recent history that I’ve actually been underwhelmed by the amount of mentions of artificial intelligence at an event... Industry insiders had been broadly anticipating the introduction of an AI bill today - but there was nothing that specific. AI was simply not under the spotlight today.”

Industry

- Simon Virley CB, Vice Chair and Head of Energy and Natural Resources at KPMG UK, on the Great British Energy Bill - “To have the greatest impact it [the government] will need to focus its limited resources where it can catalyse private sector investment in newer technologies. Hydrogen and carbon capture and storage will be essential for reaching net zero, as the Electricity System Operator (ESO) highlighted this week. This might not deliver the speedy returns that investing in more mature technologies like offshore wind would, but it will send a clear signal to investors that the UK is open to developing the markets for these technologies, reducing risks for developers.”
- Tracy Brabin, West Yorkshire Combined Authority Mayor, on the English Devolution Bill - “We will work in lockstep with this government to ensure the English Devolution Bill moves power from central government into communities - it’s a good time for English regions and we will step up to deliver the change that West Yorkshire and Britain deserves.”
- Mental health charity, Mind, on the announcement of a Mental Health Bill - “We’re over the moon. This has taken years of campaigning from the across the mental health sector and will make a huge difference to people’s lives. But it’s not the end of our fight. There are some key things that need to be included to make sure they reflect the voices of people with mental health problems. And we’ll keep pushing to make sure those voices are heard in the right places.”
- The Football Supporters’ Association on the reintroduction of the Football Governance Bill - “As expected, it’s back on and we look forward to working with Government and all MPs to get the bill across the line.”
- Stephen Phipson, CEO of Make UK, which represents manufacturers in the UK - “The first priority has to be boosting the UK’s anaemic growth rate which will be key to providing the resources for investing in public services and vitally needed infrastructure. Central to this will be an industrial strategy which addresses the skills crisis and takes advantage of rapidly accelerating technologies. Industry will welcome the Government’s recognition of these issues as key and looks forward to seeing more detail in the upcoming fiscal statement.”