



What to expect from the King's Speech 2023

Dods Political Intelligence



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INTRODUCTION

On Nov 7, 2023, the Conservative government is due to set out its legislative plans for the forthcoming parliament in the King's Speech, the centrepiece of the State Opening of Parliament. With a general election due by January 2025 and the Conservatives trailing in the polls, this represents a key opportunity for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to set out his party's priorities and ambitions. Media reports indicate the speech, which is written by the government but delivered by the monarch, could include new bills to toughen sentences for serious crimes, shape future North Sea oil and gas exploration, and set up an independent football watchdog. However, experts also predict the government will want to avoid putting forward contentious new legislation that could slow down or overshadow other bills in its agenda.

This Dods Political Intelligence report sets out the new laws, including bills carried over from the previous session, that the government is expected to put forward in the King's Speech along with a brief explanation and context, based on statements by ministers and others, and media reports. Dods does not vouch for the accuracy of the media reports cited in this report.

EXPECTED BILLS

The State Opening of Parliament begins mid-morning with King Charles' procession to Westminster from Buckingham Palace, escorted by the Household Cavalry. The speech, delivered from a throne in the House of Lords, takes place at around 11:30am. This will be Charles' first King's Speech, although he delivered the [address](#) on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II on 10 May, 2022, when she was unable to attend due to mobility issues. The speech, which outlines the government's ambitions, is followed by the publication of a more detailed [breakdown](#) of the legislative plans. The government is not compelled to deliver all the bills included in the King's Speech, and it can also bring forward other legislation during the forthcoming parliament.

After the speech and departure of the King, a new parliament begins. MPs and Lords spend the following sessions debating the contents of the King's Speech, with different days allotted for specific subject areas. After both Houses have concluded their debates, the speech is put to a vote in the Commons, though this is usually formality as the government tends to have a majority. Once it is passed, the government proceeds with its legislative plans according to its timetable.

In a [statement](#) ahead of the speech, the prime minister said, "we will bring forward bills that strengthen our society, help people feel safer in their own communities and give a sense of pride in the place they call home."

The King's Speech 2023 is expected to contain the following bills:

Criminal Justice Bill

This legislation will include tougher sentences for serious crimes, including barring rapists from early release, according to reports. It may also include provisions to enable the government to rent prison places abroad and strengthen the requirement for offenders to be present in court during sentencing. It may also include new rights for victims of crime. Home Secretary Suella Braverman has also pushed to include legislation to restrict the use of tents by homeless people in urban areas where they cause a nuisance, and introduce penalties for charities which supply tents to homeless people, according to one [report](#).

Energy Exploration Bill

This legislation will relate to future oil and gas exploration in the North Sea, including setting annual oil and gas licensing rounds, according to reports. Specifically, it is expected to make the “climate compatibility checkpoint” - the two tests which are used to decide whether to conduct a licensing round – legally binding. Such a bill would highlight a dividing line with Labour which opposes new North Sea oil and gas drilling.

Drivers Bill

The government could announce new pro-driving legislation, including making it harder for local authorities to introduce 20 mile per hour speed limit or ultralow emission zones (ULEZ), according to reports. This is likely to be seen as an overtly political move after the Conservatives narrowly won a by-election in the constituency of Uxbridge and South Ruislip following a campaign against the London ULEZ expansion, a policy championed by Labour London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

Football Governance Bill

The government has announced plans to introduce legislation to set up a new independent football regulator with powers to scrutinise club finances, vet owners, and stop clubs splitting the established leagues by joining new competitions. The government’s plans, outlined in a [white paper](#) published in February 2023 and following a fan-led review of governance , aims to protect the sport and “put fans right back at the heart of football”.

Leasehold Reform Bill

The government will introduce new legislation to ensure all new houses are sold as freehold as part of a wider reform of the leasehold system, as [flagged on social media](#) by Housing Minister Rachel Maclean. The new law would also reform the rules for extending leasing and give leaseholders more say over the management of their building and service charges and could also include a consultation on reducing ground rent to a minimal so-called peppercorn rate, according to reports.

Smoking Age Limit Bill

In his keynote Conservative party conference speech, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledged to gradually phase out smoking by raising the legal limit to buy cigarettes by one year every year. Sunak has promised to allow a free vote on the policy.

Investigatory Powers (Reform) Bill

This bill would aim to force technology companies to inform the Home Office in advance of adding planned security and privacy features, and compel them to disable those the government objects to, according to [reports](#). It would also strengthen the Home Office’s powers to force non-UK companies to change security features without the right to appeal.

Audit and Corporate Governance Reform Bill

The government has said it remains committed to bringing forward legislation to establish a new Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority to replace the existing Financial Reporting Council, as part of a wider audit and corporate governance reform and simplify regulation for business. However, one report has suggested this legislation may not feature in the speech.



Conversion Therapy Bill

The government has said it wants to introduce a bill to ban so-called conversion therapy—the practice of attempting to change an individual’s gender identity or sexual orientation—including for transgender people, according to [reports](#). However, recent reports have suggested this may also be dropped from the speech.

Hunting Trophy Bill

Campaigners are looking for the government to make good on a manifesto commitment to outlaw imports of hunting trophies, according to one report. Ministers had supported an MP’s bill to that effect, but it ran out of time after facing some opposition in the House of Lords.

Autonomous Vehicles Bill

The government could include a revised version of the Transport Bill with new laws for safe self-driving and remotely operated vehicles, licensing of London rickshaws, and possibly e-scooters, according to reports. The original Transport Bill introduced in the Queen’s Speech 2022 aimed to create Great British Railways to provide greater control of the fragmented rail service, but reports indicate this can be achieved without legislation.

Network North Bill

The prime minister has said the £36bn that was due to be invested in the cancelled HS2 phase 2 between Birmingham to Manchester will be spent on other transport projects. This package of transport investment called Network North may require additional legislation.

Offensive Weapons Bill

This bill would create an offence for possessing a prohibited blade with intent to harm, give police greater powers to confiscate and destroy lawfully owned knives that they have grounds to believe may be used for crime, and close loopholes in legislation around machetes and so-called zombie knives according to reports.

Mental Health Bill

The government published a [Draft Mental Health Bill](#) in mid-2022 which aimed to modernise the Mental Health Act, a Conservative manifesto commitment, including giving patients greater control over their treatments, revise the terms for detaining people under the original act, altering treatment of people with autism and learning disability, and revising the criteria for the use of Community Treatment Orders. However, the government has yet to respond and some reports suggest it may be shelved to focus on other priorities.

Housing (nutrient neutrality) Bill

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is keen to enable the government to ditch EU-era rules which require that new housing developments in areas with protected habitats sites do not add to the nutrient pollution to the local water catchment, according to reports. The government tabled an [amendment](#) to the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill in August which aimed to change the so-called nutrient neutrality rules, but it was defeated in the House of Lords. The government had argued that removing the legacy EU laws on nutrient neutrality would unblock the construction of more than

100,000 by 2030. Developers have argued that rules have delayed new house building, while environmentalists have countered that the rules only apply in protected areas.

Media Bill

The government published a Draft Media Bill in March 2023 which set out plans for reforming the regulation of public broadcasting in the UK to keep up to speed with how technological changes have changed viewing habits, make changes to the on-demand program services, alter the legal framework for radio including giving new powers to the Office of Communications (Ofcom). A Media Bill was published in the 2022 Queen's Speech, but it included plans to sell Channel 4. In January 2023 the government said it would not sell Channel 4 and instead wanted to remove restrictions to enable the broadcaster to produce and monetise its content.

Terrorism (Protection of premises) Bill

The government published a policy paper on a [Draft Terrorism \(Protection of premises\) Bill](#) in June. Dubbed "Martyn's Law" in name of one of the victims of the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, the law would make those responsible for certain public venues are prepared for the threat and ready to respond in the event of a terror attack, including enhanced security systems, staff training and clearer processes. The bill comes in response to the Manchester Arena Inquiry which recommended the introduction of legislation to improve safety and security of public venues.

Register of children not in school

The government has indicated it still wants to introduce a register of children not in school, an element of the Schools Bill which was dropped during the last parliamentary session.

CARRIED OVER BILLS

MPs agreed to continue progressing several bills in the forthcoming session, however the prime minister has ditched plans for one of them, legislation to enable the extension of a high speed rail line from near Crewe to Manchester ([High Speed Rail \(Crewe – Manchester\) Bill](#)).

Renters (Reform) Bill

This [legislation](#), sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and is awaiting committee stage, aims to change various laws and obligations related to rented homes, although the government has said it will delay a ban on no-fault evictions—one of the key aspects of the policy—until improvements have been made to the courts system.

Data Protection and Digital Information (No 2) Bill

This [legislation](#), which is sponsored by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and has reached report stage in the Commons, aims to regulate the processing of people's digital information, including issues such as data privacy and sharing personal information for law enforcement purposes, and reform the powers of the Information Commissioner's Office.

Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill

This [bill](#), which is sponsored by the Department for Business and Trade and has also reached the report stage in the Commons, aims to regulation of competition in digital markets. The Bill would make a number of changes to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), including enabling it to

designate powerful players in digital markets with “strategic market status” and force them to comply with consumer protection rules accordingly. It would also give the CMA new powers to address competition issues in digital markets and compel strategic players to be more transparent about mergers. On consumer protection law, The Bill would give new powers to the CMA to investigate suspected infringements and impose fines. It would also update the list of unfair commercial practices, revoke and replace some retained EU laws with respect to marketing and sales, and tackle subscription traps. This legislation could also include new measures to prevent airlines from so-called drip-pricing, where they advertise a price for a ticket but then add other sometimes significant charges for options including luggage, picking a seat, and printing boarding passes, according to reports.

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

The proposed [legislation](#), which is led by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and is awaiting a third reading in the Commons, aims to prevent public bodies from being influenced by foreign states when taking economic decisions. The legislation, which would stop local councils from boycotting procurement from Israel, has taken on particular significance following the large-scale Israeli military operation in response to the Hamas attack in early October.

Victims and Prisoners Bill

This [bill](#), which is sponsored by the Ministry of Justice and has concluded the committee stage in the Commons, is designed to strengthen the rights of victims of crime, revise the functions of the Parole Board, stop some convicts from getting married, and change some rules governing the release of prisoners.

Holocaust Memorial Bill

This [legislation](#), which was sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and has received a second reading, aims to pave the way for the construction of a Holocaust Memorial and learning centre.



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