



# Assessing the King's Speech 2026

[wacomms.com](http://wacomms.com)



# Contents

1. Introduction
2. An ambitious agenda
3. Education & Skills
4. Energy
5. Financial & Professional Services
6. Health
7. Transport

# Introduction

The King's Speech shows a clear attempt to recast the Government's agenda around security and resilience – warning that “every element of the nation's energy, defence and economic security will be tested.”, and that the Government would take decisions to protect these areas “for the long-term”, while also touching on public service reform, living standards, trust in public office, housing, opportunity and fairness.

By linking economic growth, energy independence, defence, borders and public service reform under the same “security” frame, Keir Starmer is trying to shift the conversation from internal Labour instability back onto governing, delivery and long-term national interest.

For now, he appears to have secured a temporary truce. The King's Speech gives the Government a reason to insist that attention should return to governing, and supporters of the Prime Minister have argued that an immediate leadership contest would further destabilise the country. The practical implication is that the King's Speech may buy Starmer some time.

**This does not remove the immediate risk of further political instability. Yet it should not be mistaken for policy paralysis.**

While the Labour leadership question remains unresolved, many of the measures announced today would be expected to continue progressing regardless of who is in Number 10.

Bills will now begin making their way through Parliament, and there will remain clear opportunities to engage with the detail, shape implementation, and influence the debate. The wider political uncertainty makes that engagement more important, not less.

Much of the legislative agenda is likely to continue under either Wes Streeting or Andy Burnham, given Labour was elected on its 2024 manifesto and many of the measures announced today reflect commitments the party would still be expected to deliver. The immediate difference under either would be one of emphasis, tone and political positioning.

Streeting would probably present himself as more overtly business-friendly, with a sharper focus on growth, delivery and market confidence, while Burnham would be expected to speak more directly to Labour's left and core vote, with some of his supporters hoping for a clearer break from Starmer. However, looking at Burnham's record in Greater Manchester and in previous Labour governments, he is unlikely to depart wholesale from the core policy programme.

Equally, the Conservatives have sought to exploit the moment by publishing their own Alternative King's Speech. Their response puts particular emphasis on welfare reform, cutting regulation, backing high streets, cheaper energy, exploiting North Sea oil and gas, leaving the ECHR, tougher borders, policing, defence and school standards. While none of this is likely to shape the immediate parliamentary agenda, it gives a clear sense of where the opposition will seek to pressure the government over the coming weeks.

To assess the implications of the government's programme for your business, or understand possible scenarios ahead, please get in touch at [contact@wacomms.com](mailto:contact@wacomms.com).

# An ambitious agenda

## SIR PHILIP RUTNAM

Chair of WA's Advisory Board and  
former Whitehall Permanent Secretary



I can't personally recall a State Opening of Parliament like this - where all the pomp and ceremony and a whole new legislative programme get completely overshadowed by a crisis surrounding the Prime Minister. There are risks in that of course: one is that the programme doesn't last, but another is that we miss what's significant and lose out on opportunities or challenges as a result.

If we put the crisis to one side, and look at the legislative programme, I'm struck that there's actually quite a lot here. First of all, it's a massive programme: 37 Bills are listed in the briefing notes, albeit maybe seven or eight of those are carried over from the last session, and at least three are draft Bills. A typical programme would be much smaller: say 20 or 25 Bills.

Then six or eight Bills could actually turn out to be landmark reforms and still be remembered in ten or twenty years' time. Like lowering the voting age to 16, or changing the shape of water regulation, or creating a new National Police Service and merging multiple police forces (last done in the 1960s, and badly overdue). Then there's the SEND reforms and the shift in property from leasehold to the new commonhold, and (maybe) some of the stuff on health and social care. I'd even add the European Partnerships Bill, which creates a new framework for putting UK/EU treaties into UK law (remember the European Communities Act anyone?).

Go down a level, to more technical measures, and there's quite a lot that could be significant. The new Highways Bill will create a new RAB-based model for regulating privately financed roads, with a new independent regulator and licensing regime. Interesting and important - even if it goes in completely the opposite direction to the GB Railways Bill! The Financial Services Bill, the Competition Bill, the Regulating for Growth Bill, the Energy Bills and the Civil Aviation Bill all shift the balance in key regulated markets, albeit in different directions - some very pro-consumer, pro-security of supply, some more pro-business and restricting the regulators' role. Ditto Digital ID, Social Housing and the draft Taxis and Private Hire Vehicle Bill.

I did a quick comparison of this programme with the Queen's Speech at the same stage under the last Labour Government: in 1999, two years in. My overall conclusion: there's about as much substance in this one, but (even the Starmer leadership crisis aside) a bit less coherence, and much less excitement and impact.

# Education & Skills: Delivering inclusive education

## LEE FINDELL

Partner, Head of Education & Skills



A central focus of the Government's agenda during its time in office has been breaking down barriers to opportunity and weakening the link between socioeconomic background and success.

Labour has sought to realise this ambition through taking a more interventionist approach across the education and skills landscape, with policies focused on directing support to younger people, particularly those not in education, employment or training. This has included efforts to expand apprenticeships, reform Ofsted, establish Skills England and shift the focus of post-18 education policy away from the previous target of 50 per cent of young adults attending university. Alongside this, ministers have expanded regional skills provision and apprenticeships to better align educational outcomes with labour market demand and economic growth priorities.

However, the Government has argued that longstanding structural challenges across schools, higher education and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision continue to hold back outcomes for many children and young people. Ministers have increasingly framed reform of the education system as central not only to improving social mobility, but also to addressing workforce shortages, supporting economic growth and reducing regional inequality.

Against this backdrop, the centrepiece of the Government's legislative agenda in this area is the long-awaited Education for All Bill. The Bill aims to raise standards across schools while introducing what ministers have described as "generational reforms" to the SEND system.

**At the heart of the legislation is a commitment to create a more inclusive education system focused on earlier intervention, improved local provision and more consistent support for children and young people with special educational needs.**

Specifically, the Bill sets out intentions to reform the SEND system through the following principles: a strengthening of early intervention, reducing the number of children needing to travel long distances to attend settings, improving fairness within the system, ensuring the reforms are grounded in evidence, and creating better partnership working between education, health and care providers.

While the Government is likely heading into a period of uncertainty, the direction of travel on education reform is settled and unlikely to fundamentally change. The emphasis on skills, inclusion, workforce readiness and expanding opportunity has broad support across the Labour Party. As a result, regardless of who occupies Number 10 in the months ahead, the aims and approach seen in the Education for All Bill and the Government's wider focus on upskilling the UK's workforce are expected to remain.

[leefindell@wacomms.com](mailto:leefindell@wacomms.com)

# Energy: From ambition to delivery, addressing the barriers to clean power

## ANGUS HILL

Partner, Head of Energy



Since entering Government, energy policy under Ed Miliband's command has been one of the clearest expressions of Labour's governing agenda.

The Clean Power Mission has provided a central organising framework for the Government's approach, linking energy security, economic growth, industrial strategy and household affordability. The measures announced in the King's Speech now mark an attempt to move that agenda from ambition into delivery, with further legislation designed to address some of the practical barriers that have slowed progress to date.

Labour has so far placed clean power and energy independence at the centre of its policy agenda. However, concerns have remained across industry and Whitehall about the pace of delivery. Delays to grid access and growing network demand have become major constraints on investment, while instability in global energy markets has reinforced concerns around affordability and energy security.

Against this backdrop, the Government has introduced the Energy Independence Bill, positioned as the "next step" in the Government's plan to deliver affordable clean energy. Measures to address grid queue reform and accelerate network build-out feature prominently, including a more strategic approach to planning and building energy infrastructure through changes to planning and consenting rules.

The Bill also gives further shape to the Government's Warm Homes Plan, a central plank of its approach to lowering bills, improving energy efficiency and supporting the transition to clean heat. The legislation is intended to provide a clearer delivery framework for upgrading homes, reducing household exposure to volatile fossil fuel prices and supporting consumers through the shift to lower-carbon heating. It also includes powers enabling targeted support for energy bills and stronger regulatory powers for Ofgem to act against unfair practices in the retail market.

This is politically significant because clean heat remains one of the harder parts of the net zero agenda to deliver. While progress on power generation is more advanced, decarbonising homes requires sustained consumer engagement, supply chain growth, upfront investment and policy stability.

**By placing the Warm Homes Plan within the wider Energy Independence Bill, the Government is signalling that it will continue to pursue progress on clean heat alongside its clean power ambitions, while seeking to keep affordability at the centre of the transition.**

The Nuclear Regulation Bill will implement recommendations from the Fingleton Review aimed at speeding up nuclear deployment and reducing costs. The legislation seeks to streamline regulatory processes, improve coordination between regulators and move towards a more proportionate, outcomes-focused system while maintaining safety and environmental protections. Ministers argue these reforms will support delivery of projects such as Sizewell C and Small Modular Reactors.

Finally, the Government has introduced the Electricity Generator Levy Bill, formalising the increase of the levy from 45% to 55% from July. The measure is designed to encourage generators onto fixed-price contracts and raise additional revenue for Government support measures.

Taken together, these measures are intended to provide greater long-term policy certainty at a time of wider political instability. The focus will now shift to implementation: whether the reforms can accelerate infrastructure delivery, unlock investment, sustain progress on clean heat and, ultimately, help reduce energy costs for consumers and businesses.

[angushill@wacomms.com](mailto:angushill@wacomms.com)

# Financial & Professional Services: More delivery than drama

## TOM FRACKOWIAK

Senior Partner, Head of  
Financial & Professional Services



Unlike 2024's King's Speech, which brought financial services firmly back into Westminster's focus through major legislation on pensions, digital finance and investment, today's announcements were less about dramatic new policy interventions and more about embedding a direction of travel that has steadily emerged under Rachel Reeve's Treasury.

The Enhancing Financial Services Bill introduced today is a consolidation of a broader shift in the Government's approach, which is moving away from post-crisis caution and towards one increasingly focused on competitiveness, simplification and growth.

That direction was reinforced more broadly across the King's Speech through the Competition Reform Bill and the Regulating for Growth Bill, both of which signal a wider effort to create a more agile, investment-friendly regulatory environment across the economy.

At the centre of the Financial Services Bill package is the long-trailed decision to fold the Payment Systems Regulator (PSR) into the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), with ministers arguing the move will reduce duplication, streamline decision-making and create a more coherent regulatory framework for payments and fintech firms.

Alongside this, the Government has confirmed reforms to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS), an area where industry concerns around unpredictability and retrospective interpretation have steadily climbed the political agenda. While consumer protection remains central, today's announcements confirm the Government's continued sympathy towards arguments that regulatory certainty and proportionality are also essential to growth.

The Senior Managers and Certification Regime (SMCR) will also undergo further reform. Once seen as a cornerstone of the post-2008 accountability framework, the regime has increasingly been criticised by firms as overly burdensome and administratively complex. The Government's reforms are aimed at retaining accountability while reducing barriers to recruitment, innovation and competitiveness. In order to unlock further growth for SMEs, the Bill will also update the frameworks around the ring-fencing regime requiring all banks to separate their UK retail banking services from activities around investment banking.

**Under Chancellor Rachel Reeves, the Treasury has consistently framed financial and professional services as a national asset central to delivering economic growth.**

That political tone matters and after years in which the industry has often felt politically peripheral, today's King's Speech continues to solidify the sector's spot in the Government's broader economic strategy. This broader direction of travel has, so far, been relatively well received across much of the City. Firms increasingly view Reeves' Treasury as pragmatic, growth-focused and broadly understanding of concerns around regulatory burden and international competitiveness.

However, recent tensions around the Pension Schemes Act 2026 also demonstrated the limits of that consensus. The Government's push for its controversial reserve mandation powers sparked significant concern across parts of the industry, particularly those wary of greater political direction over capital allocation decisions. While ministers ultimately secured passage of the legislation, the debate exposed an underlying tension at the heart of Labour's financial services agenda – balancing competitiveness and growth with a more activist state role in driving investment priorities.

As ever, the wider context is impossible to ignore. With limited fiscal headroom and stubbornly weak growth forecasts, the Government increasingly sees private capital, investment and financial services dynamism as essential to delivering its economic agenda. The City has been firmly at the centre of Starmer's economic project, and the sector has undergone its most significant regulatory and structural changes since the financial crisis. However, growing speculation around Labour's leadership and long-term political direction is beginning to create greater uncertainty across the industry about what the future shape and priorities of UK financial services policy could ultimately look like.

[tomfrackowiak@wacomms.com](mailto:tomfrackowiak@wacomms.com)

# Health: Continued commitment to NHS reform, but with uncertain leadership

## DEAN SOWMAN

Senior Partner, Head of Health



Against increased pressure on Keir Starmer and uncertainty around Wes Streeting's future position, the NHS remains one of the clearest opportunities for the Government to demonstrate visible progress and reform – making delivery in health politically imperative over the coming months.

Today's King's Speech set out a largely anticipated legislative programme focused on accelerating structural NHS reform, expanding data-sharing powers, and consolidating the patient safety and regulatory landscape. While many of the individual measures had already been signalled through the Government's 10 Year Health Plan, today restates the political direction of travel in health; away from trying to mandate improvements within existing frameworks and towards a continued explicit programme of reform that delivers measurable change.

At the centre of the health announcements sits legislation to formally abolish NHS England and transfer its functions back into the Department of Health and Social Care. Since the Lansley reforms in 2012, successive governments have attempted to place operational distance between ministers and the NHS. This legislation reflects Labour's determination to reverse that approach entirely.

In practice, much of the restructuring has already begun through unified leadership arrangements, staff reductions and the merging of operational functions. The legislation simply enables the final legal dissolution of NHS England to take place by 2027.

**This nevertheless remains one of the most politically significant health reforms in recent years, with the Government seeking fewer layers of responsibility, fewer bodies and faster delivery.**

At the same time, today's publication confirms that delivery responsibility is increasingly expected to sit at a local level through devolved commissioning, neighbourhood health models and greater flexibility for systems to shape services around population need. In practice, this means more focused national direction combined with greater accountability on local systems to deliver personalised, measurable improvement against national priorities like productivity, prevention, waiting lists and public confidence. This means it is more important than ever that companies and organisations looking to engage with the system adopt an agile approach.

Alongside structural reform, the Speech also places a strong emphasis on digitisation and data integration. The proposed legislation will require hospitals and GPs to share patient information more systematically as part of a wider £10bn NHS digitisation programme, building towards a single, unified patient record. With continued Treasury pressure to improve public sector productivity without upping funding, DHSC increasingly sees technology and digital interoperability not simply as healthcare ambitions but as essential to making the NHS financially sustainable.

With regards to life sciences, the Regulating for Growth Bill places a clear focus on reducing regulatory barriers to innovation adoption – with new sandboxing powers intended to accelerate access to emerging technologies and innovation through more flexible real-world evidence generation.

Health has become something of a double-edged sword politically. Successful delivery strengthens public perceptions around the Government's competence, while also priming potential future leadership candidates. We could very soon be seeing delivery of reforms placed in a new pair of hands - and ones potentially more averse to conflict than Wes has arguably been.

Ultimately, today's announcements show that the Government remains set on a pathway for the NHS of modernisation, productivity and system re-design. The question is now who will be overseeing the translation of institutional reform into improvements that the public can actually feel – with the pressure to deliver greater than ever.

[deansowman@wacomms.com](mailto:deansowman@wacomms.com)

# Transport: An ambitious multi-modal agenda

## MARC WOOLFSON

Founding Partner, Head of Transport



Today's King's Speech lays the groundwork for tighter regulation and greater Government control across key parts of the transport sector through five major pieces of legislation this Parliamentary term.

The Government is simultaneously seeking to attract greater private investment into roads and aviation while pressing ahead with the nationalisation of rail services, highlighting tensions in its broader approach to transport governance and sending mixed signals to investors.

A new Civil Aviation Bill will support airport expansion, airspace modernisation and stronger Civil Aviation Authority powers over consumer protections. Aviation is central to the Government's growth agenda, with expansion expected to unlock investment, increase capacity and support trade and tourism. The Department for Transport will sponsor the Bill, although the Treasury is likely to remain influential given Rachel Reeves' support for Heathrow's third runway. However, political uncertainty at the top of Government could yet affect the project if Reeves is replaced by a figure who is less supportive of aviation growth, such as Ed Miliband.

Despite this positive step for the sector, aviation continues to face significant pressures, including disruption to jet fuel supplies from the Iran conflict, rising business rates and uncertainty around future SAF feedstock supply chains.

Alongside this, a Highways (Financing) Bill will introduce a new Regulated Asset Base funding model to unlock private capital for road maintenance, alongside a licensing regime for private toll road operators. Together, these measures signal a clear intention to increase private sector involvement in road infrastructure while easing pressure on public finances.

The Draft Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Bill will modernise legislation that, outside London, dates back to 1847. National standards will improve consistency between local authorities, while regulators will gain stronger enforcement powers against operators and drivers breaching licensing rules. Baroness Casey's recommendations on safety, particularly around combatting grooming gangs and violence against women and girls, will also be implemented, alongside stronger protections for disabled passengers (reflecting that those with mobility difficulties make almost 70% more taxi or PHV trips per year).

On rail, the flagship Railways and Passenger Benefits Bill is being carried over into the new session, with a minor adaptation to its title. The legislation will formally establish Great British Railways and give Government greater control over the rail network. The Bill is expected to face resistance in the Lords, particularly over concerns that operators outside GBR's remit, including Open Access and freight, could be disadvantaged.

Finally, a Northern Powerhouse Rail Bill will seek to improve intercity connectivity across the North through a phased delivery strategy, although local leaders have criticised earlier plans for excluding areas such as Hull, Bradford and Sheffield.

**With five transport bills coming forward, this Parliamentary session will be pivotal for the sector. For businesses, navigating the tensions within this multi-modal legislative programme and ensuring continuity under any future Labour leadership changes will be critical.**

[marcwoolfson@wacomms.com](mailto:marcwoolfson@wacomms.com)



We are a strategic communications consultancy helping organisations achieve policy and reputational outcomes.

We're specialists in areas where government action, media interest and public impact are interlinked – including energy, education, financial services, healthcare and transport – and experts in navigating these complex communications environments.

[contact@wacomms.co.uk](mailto:contact@wacomms.co.uk)

[wacomms.com](http://wacomms.com)

