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The reforms to the courts and judicial appointments will be debated first in the Lords, where the Crime and Courts bill has already been introduced. It devolves to the Lord Chief Justice judicial appointments to the Circuit bench and below, changes the appointments panel for the Supreme Court, and allows for part time Justices.

Changing the rules of succession had been expected as a bill (see [r 50](#), January 2012): it is not known what further negotiation is needed with the other realms before the UK can set the lead in changing the rules on succession to the Crown. Other constitutional items missing from the Queen's Speech are legislation on lobbying, parliamentary privilege, and recall of MPs. These are all topics on which the government has recently published proposals, discussed elsewhere in this issue of the [r](#).

### Statutory register of lobbyists

January saw the government commence consultation on the introduction of a statutory register of lobbyists. The proposed register, part of the coalition's Programme for Government aimed at improving transparency, would require lobbying firms to register details of their employees, noting any ministerial or civil service background, and their list of clients.

Concerns exist regarding the scope and focus of the current proposals, as the register would not cover in-house lobbyists such as News Corporation's Frédéric Michel, who are said to account for the majority of the industry. This has been met with widespread disapproval in the media and was opposed in a number of submissions to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, responsible for the pre-legislative scrutiny.

The Committee held its final evidence session on 17 May, hearing from Mark Harper MP, Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform. Further pre-legislative scrutiny of a white paper and draft bill will follow.

### Lords reform

Since January there have been two major developments on Lords reform: the publication in April of the Joint Committee's report on the government's draft bill, and the announcement in May of a bill in the Queen's Speech. There was also some progress on David Steel's private peer's bill.

It was always going to be difficult for the Joint Committee to agree a report. The committee had 26 members, drawn equally from the two chambers, representing all the main parliamentary groups and a wide range of opinions. Many of the report's conclusions were therefore supported by only a majority of its members, and a group of 12 members released an 'alternative report' disagreeing with many of the key conclusions.

On 17 May 2012, the Committee published its





Both the government and Labour have reiterated their aversion to increasing state funding to meet the funding shortfall, as was recommended in the Committee on Standards in Public Life report, published in November 2011.

### Individual electoral registration

In response to the government's draft individual electoral registration (IER) bill (published June 2011), the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (PCRC) acknowledged that while there is a general consensus on IER in principle, questions have been raised over its implementation. The government responded to the PCRC in February, outlining changes to the initial proposals. Data-matching (checking with other government databases e.g. DVLA) would be used to ensure a smooth transition, and the 2013 canvass will be moved to 2014. The government remains undecided over plans to allow voters to 'opt-out' of registering to vote, and whether failure to register should be made a criminal offence. There was no mention of halting the sale of the edited electoral register, a move that is supported by the Electoral Commission and others.

On 1 March the Electoral Commission announced that despite inconclusive trial results, data-matching has potential. The electoral registration and administration bill which made it into the Queen's Speech on 9 May keeps IER firmly on the agenda.

### Mayoral referenda

Ten cities voted in referenda on introducing a mayor on 3 May. The result was a resounding defeat for the mayoral project, with Bristol the only city to vote in favour. The referenda were also overshadowed by poor turnout, with an average of 28.8 per cent across the country and only 24 per cent in Bristol.

The implications for the government's localism plans—a core manifesto commitment of both coalition parties—look bleak. Critics have argued that the 'no' vote was a product of mayors being perceived as an unnecessary expense, whose powers and pay are insufficiently defined. Notwithstanding, long-time advocate of mayors Lord Adonis has said he expects to see mayors in all major cities within a decade, but as a 'bottom-up not a top-down process'. Liverpool, Salford, Doncaster and Leicester have all appointed mayors in the last year through local referenda or local council agreement.

See video of our seminar on elected mayors with Lord Adonis and Mayor of Hackney Jules Pipe on our website.

### Elected police commissioners

15 November 2012 has been set as the day for election of Police and Crime Commissioners across England. These new roles, created by the Police and Social Responsibility Act 2011, have been introduced to re-establish the link between the police and their local community. The commissioners will be accountable for their local police force and set local crime plans to address community issues.

Seen as a key coalition agreement, the reform has sparked intense debate. Lord Ian Blair has stated that police forces such as Thames Valley or Northumbria are simply too large and diverse for one individual to represent. Labour have criticised spending £125m on elections instead of frontline services and Lib Dems are worried about politicizing the police. Nevertheless, Labour and the Conservatives intend to field candidates for all 41 forces; Labour already have eight former ministers running including John Prescott (Humberside). Lembit Opik is rumoured as a Lib Dem candidate for Northumbria.

### Northern Ireland

This financial year the cuts introduced by Chancellor George Osborne will really hit the devolved jurisdictions, via their 'Barnett consequentials'. The theory is that confidence will then grow and businesses will invest, with the public sector no longer 'crowding out' the private.

Northern Ireland is the UK region where the public sector's proportion of gross domestic product is highest, so already the cuts are hurting. And the pain is exacerbated by the continuing refusal of the devolved administration to grasp the nettle of finding an equitable way of paying for water, so that health and education spending are further reduced.

Hospital accident-and-emergency departments are one of the front lines. In March the Royal College of Nursing warned that several were at 'breaking point'. The chair of the British Medical Association's GPs' committee interrupted a conference of the association in Northern Ireland to protest that waiting times for hospital appointments were, in his experience, the worst in the UK and that this was 'damaging patients'.

Also in March, the education minister, John O'Dowd, presented to the assembly the results of a viability audit of schools in the region. In Northern Ireland's still selective system, a remarkable 84 per cent of secondary schools (though only 35 per cent of grammars) were found to be struggling educationally, financially, or in terms of pupil numbers. It is estimated that a £300m investment is needed to bring the schools estate up to standard, including in some cases to meet health-and-safety criteria; the minister found £27m in May, following an internal review of its budget.

In April the chair of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) reported that unfitnes in the region was rising for the first time in the four decades since the executive was formed in response to the civil rights movement. The NIHE estimates that at least £1bn is needed to renovate the social housing stock, yet the funding annually available for improvement has fallen in five years from £63m to just £5m.

Nor is there any prospect that this pain will be offset by private sector gain. Basic Keynesian economics would dictate the contrary, and in March the chief Northern Ireland economist of the Ulster Bank noted that firms in the region had seen demand for their products fall for more than 50 successive months, while the UK economy was flatlining.

Dr Robin Wilson is a Constitution Unit Honorary Senior Research Fellow and author of *The Northern Ireland Economy* (Manchester University Press, 2010).

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government, the SNP won the most local seats and their highest-ever total (424 of 1223, or 34.7 per cent) and made bigger gains than Labour (now at 394 seats, 32.2 per cent), while the Conservatives lost 20 per cent (now 115, 9.4 per cent) and the Liberal Democrats lost 57 per cent (now 71, 5.8 per cent). This contrasts sharply with results in England, where the coalition parties made the traditional incumbent losses and Labour became the largest party.

We have also witnessed the unusual effect of some unusually high property prices in the West



# Bulletin Board Constitution Unit Newsletter

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