

Government contract uses the latest technology for search and rescue

The MCA, an executive agency of the Department for Transport, has today signed a circa £1.6 billion contract with UK company Bristow Helicopters Ltd following an extensive 18-month procurement process.

Minister for Maritime and Aviation, Robert Courts MP, announced today that the contract for the UK Second-Generation Search and Rescue Aviation programme – known as UKSAR2G – would be awarded to Bristow Helicopters Ltd to deliver both rotary and fixed wing services for the next ten years.

Bristow Helicopters Ltd has provided the UK search and rescue helicopter service for the MCA since 2013, with the aerial reconnaissance aircraft provided by 2Excel Aviation since 2019. These aircraft fly not only for HM Coastguard but also on behalf of other Government Departments.

The new contract will see the UK search and rescue region benefit from both innovation and advances in technology to save more lives, even more quickly. It will combine the existing two separate aviation contracts for both fixed wing aircraft and rotary aircraft. It will also include the use of uncrewed aircraft (drones). This will provide better value for money for the taxpayer and allow for more innovation throughout the life of the contract.

As part of the new contract, Bristow Helicopters Ltd will continue to operate from their current ten helicopter bases and launch two new seasonal bases in Fort William and Carlisle, to serve areas around two of the busiest locations for summer tourism.

All helicopter bases will continue to be operational 24 hours a day. The Fort William and Carlisle will operate 12 hours a day from April to September. The transition out from the current contracts will start 30 September 2024 and run through to 31 December 2026, to ensure a continuation of search and rescue aviation services across the whole of the UK. There will be three fixed-wing bases at Doncaster, Prestwick and Newquay.

The MCA has undertaken extensive sophisticated modelling to project future demand on our services. This makes sure the MCA can tailor future services to meet the demand required and to provide enhancements to the service using new systems and technology. Bristow will operate:

- 18 Helicopters including existing Leonardo AW189s and Sikorsky S92As augmented with the introduction of Leonardo AW139 helicopters.
- six King Air fixed-wing planes, including the B350, B350ER and the B200; and
- one mobile deployable Schiebel S-100 drone system.

Drones became part of HM Coastguard's aviation fleet in March 2022 and are currently deployed supporting search and rescue activity in the English

Channel. Bristow Helicopters Ltd will therefore continue to build upon this to enhance situational awareness for emergency responders as part of UKSAR2G. Drones have the capability to transmit real-time data including live imagery from the scene to Coastguard operations rooms as well as other responders. As HM Coastguard celebrates its 200-year anniversary, innovations like this will help evolve search and rescue for the next decade and beyond.

A high degree of innovation has also been proposed by Bristow Helicopters Ltd in the form of a new state-of-the-art search and rescue helicopter simulation training facility at Solent Airport next to the Coastguard Training Facility which will house a synthetic rescue hoist and helicopter suspended over a large training pool. Other innovation includes the use of sustainable aviation fuels, reducing our carbon footprint in the delivery of these services.

Today's announcement represents a major investment by the government in providing a national search and rescue aviation service using a tailored solution, making sure the most appropriate aircraft are at the most suitable locations to meet the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's commitment to the public. These services will continue to support the work of other Government Departments in detecting and deterring illegal activity at sea and supporting other Government work where needed.

Damien Oliver, Senior Responsible Owner for UKSAR2G said:

We know there are people alive today because an HM Coastguard helicopter came to their rescue. When looking at the next decade of service and rescue services, the thought of the future people whose lives may well also be saved as a result of this contract was a huge incentive to make sure this will build on that success and improve it still further. I am also delighted that we can continue to support the work of our partners across Government in all the work that they do.

This is the excellent result from an 18-month procurement to deliver a new highly capable and innovative search and rescue aviation service. The new service will build on the success of the current arrangements that have been in place since 2015.

OSCE Special Representative on Gender: UK response, July 2022

Thank you, Mr Chair. I would like to thank the Special Representative on Gender for her remarks and welcome her warmly to this Council. We strongly

endorse your messages on enhancing gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and underline their centrality to the future of our economies, societies, communities and the security of our region.

You are right to emphasise that the overwhelming threat that we face now is Russian aggression against Ukraine, and we welcome the report's focus on monitoring the situation of Ukrainian women refugees. 8 million people have left Ukraine since the conflict started, and as of 13 July, UNHCR recorded over 5.8 million refugees from Ukraine across Europe. The present situation constitutes the fastest-growing refugee crisis since the Second World War. That the current crisis is remarkable by the standards of over 75 years of events, war and terrorism puts President's Putin's actions into alarming context. Remember – this is a war of choice.

As we heard from Special Representative Richey earlier this week, the vast majority of refugees are women and children, and they are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking. We echo Special Representative Palihovici's call for training for police and border guards on human trafficking and gender-based violence, and will continue to share UK best practice and materials with local law enforcement partners. We have prioritised our humanitarian response to support the most at-risk populations, including women and girls, and we support the Special Representative's recommendation for all humanitarian actors to engage expertise to navigate gender-based violence and other protection issues.

We are deeply concerned by the persisting protection gaps for people with disabilities, children with special needs and minority groups – especially Roma women, as flagged in the report. We also highlight the additional challenges faced by older people. We must advocate for the most marginalised and at-risk people in our society, particularly under these cruellest of circumstances.

Special Representative Palihovici's report also highlighted the excellent work being done to help Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Austria, Poland and Moldova. We commend these and other neighbouring countries for stepping up, and have provided £40 million to international agencies to assist their efforts. The UK will continue to support our partners shouldering the largest burdens from the fallout of Russia's war, and we continue to welcome Ukrainian refugees under our own Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family schemes.

Our message to Ukrainian people forced to flee the Kremlin's war is clear and simple: the UK and our partners will support you until the victory of your armed forces enables you to return home – however long it takes. Thank you, Mr Chair.

Breaking the links between politics, business and illicit activity in the Western Balkans

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has tasked me with strengthening the UK's relationship with the six countries of the Western Balkans – through more trade and investment, increased energy security, cultural co-operation, security and defence, and fighting organised crime together.

I am a frequent guest in the countries of the region, and have just returned from Tirana, Skopje and Podgorica, where I have heard one message loud and clear from people of all walks of life: young people are leaving, driven out by lack of opportunities, feeling they cannot succeed if they don't have political connections and frustrated by entrenched corruption. They ask us to help build a better society and to hold their leaders to account for it.

Institutions, civil society, journalists and criminal justice officials are working to build prosperous, safe democracies. Most of the real effort will be on the ground, across the Western Balkans – effort by honest prosecutors, intrepid journalists, dedicated police, visionary leaders. In Albania, with justice reform, the Special Anti-Corruption Agency (SPAK) and the National Bureau for Investigation (NBI), we have a tailwind for change.

The UK is with you in this endeavour. Progress is being made. Some people who previously felt they were immune are now in prison. But others still operate as if they have impunity for wrongdoing, as if the rule of law does not apply equally to everyone.

And so we are stepping up our efforts to disrupt links between politics, business and illicit activity, both around the world and in the Western Balkans. We have designated 27 individuals involved in serious corruption around the world under our Global Anti-Corruption sanctions regime since its launch. A new Register of Overseas Entities, requiring those behind foreign companies which own UK property to reveal their identities, will be created under the Economic Crime Act. And we have established a new 'Kleptocracy Cell' based in the National Crime Agency, to target sanctions evasion and corrupt Russian assets hidden in the UK.

This week, we took disruptive action against several Albanian individuals with well publicised and documented ties to criminality and corruption. This is the first wave of a set of actions intended to encourage accountability and end impunity. The UK has a range of tools available to disrupt individuals with ties to criminality and corruption, including immigration and economic disruption. The details of these actions may not always be public.

The support that some public figures receive from criminals in exchange for their corruption smothers the voice of the Albanian people. As the OSCE's

report on international monitoring of last year's parliamentary elections shows, vote-buying and misuse of public funds continue to be a major problem in Albanian politics. So long as politicians are able to work with criminals to buy, blackmail and intimidate voters, Albanian democracy will remain fragile and incomplete. Further change and electoral reform are needed now.

Organised crime and corruption in Albania – and the wider region – also mean that vast amounts of state funds, collected from ordinary tax-payers, never reach the schools, hospitals and roads that Albanians need to build a healthy, prosperous society.

For all of you in Albania and the region striving for reform, I also have a message: we will back you in your judicial reforms, which have helped to weed out corrupt officials and led to the prosecution of powerful figures. We will support you in reforming your elections and in all your efforts for transparency, accountability and democracy. We will help boost civic engagement in holding government to account.

We hail those brave investigative journalists who have exposed corruption and links between politics, business and crime – often in the face of violence and intimidation from criminals. They must continue to do so with the full protection of governments and law enforcement agencies and with the support of those who cherish freedom.

We are with you on your journey to build the state that your people deserve.

The United Kingdom's message to those who are involved in crime or corruption is this: promoting crime or corruption – whether in the Western Balkans or elsewhere – will not go without consequences and you will not be welcome in the UK. Those individuals who do so damage their society and their state. Whether through sanctions, immigration action or policies of non-engagement, the UK will act to root out corruption and organised crime.

Together we will make sure that no one is above the law.

[Sir Stuart Peach](#) is the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to the Western Balkans.

UK to send scores of artillery guns and hundreds of drones to Ukraine

The UK will supply scores of artillery guns, hundreds of drones and hundreds more anti-tank weapons to Ukraine in the coming weeks, the Defence Secretary has revealed.

The delivery of the new equipment will significantly step up the UK's support as the country fights to repel Russia's brutal and unjustified invasion.

More than 20 M109 155mm self-propelled guns and 36 L119 105mm artillery guns will soon arrive from the UK, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace announced in an update to Parliament today. Counter-battery radar systems and more than 50,000 rounds of ammunition for Ukraine's existing Soviet era artillery will also follow, he added.

This equipment will bolster the Armed Forces of Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russia's indiscriminate use of artillery.

The UK will also send more than 1,600 more anti-tank weapons in the coming weeks, along with drones, including hundreds of loitering aerial munitions.

So far 6,900 NLAW, Javelin, Brimstone and other anti-tank weapons, as well as 16,000 artillery rounds, six Stormer vehicles fitted with Starstreak anti-air missile launchers and hundreds of missiles have been sent to Ukraine.

The UK has also supplied maritime Brimstone missiles, [multiple launch rocket systems](#), 120 armoured fighting vehicles and large quantities of non-lethal aid including more than 82,000 helmets, 8,450 sets of body armour and over 5,000 night vision devices.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The scale and range of equipment we are providing demonstrates the strength of our resolve. Together with our international partners, we will ensure Ukraine has the tools to defend their country from Putin's illegal invasion.

The uplift comes after Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced in June that the UK would provide [another £1 billion of military support to Ukraine](#).

The funding, which brings UK military support and broader regional activity since the outbreak of war to £2.3bn, will herald a new phase in the international community's support, enabling Ukraine to go beyond their valiant defence against the illegal Russian invasion and mount offensive operations.

The next phase of military support, paid for with this additional funding, will include even more sophisticated air defence systems, uncrewed aerial vehicles and innovative new electronic warfare equipment.

It comes after the UK [launched a major training operation for Ukrainian forces](#), with the potential to train up to 10,000 soldiers.

[The Defence Secretary recently visited some of the first Ukrainian soldiers](#) taking part in the programme, which is taking place at sites across the North West, South West and South East of the UK.

Transport update: search and rescue

Following an extensive 18-month procurement process to procure the next decade of search and rescue aviation services, this process has now finished, and I wish to inform the House of the results.

I am pleased to announce that a £1.6 billion contract will be signed today (21 July 2022) to provide a search and rescue helicopter service for the whole of the UK with Bristow Helicopters Ltd. The new contract will see the UK search and rescue region benefit from advances in technology to save more lives, even more quickly.

A fleet of state-of-the-art helicopters, planes and drones will operate across the United Kingdom and far out to sea in support of the lifesaving work of HM Coastguard. These aircraft will also support the work of the other emergency services, border protection, fisheries protection and pollution prevention.

A strong competition led to this contract being signed, and a credible, data-led requirement resulted in a contract that is highly innovative and takes account of anticipated future demands such as increased tourism in certain areas.

The new contract will guarantee that there will be no base closures or job losses in this critical service. Instead, 2 new seasonal bases, operating for 6 months of the year, will be opened in areas of particular growing demand.

A new base at Fort William will meet the summertime peak tourism demand in the Ben Nevis area, while a new base in Carlisle will also meet similar demands in the Lake District area.

All helicopter bases will continue to be operational 24 hours a day, apart for Fort William and Carlisle which will operate 12 hours a day from April to September.

The transition out from the current contract will start 30 September 2024 and run through to 31 December 2026. The transition will be seamless and will follow extensive engagement with stakeholders including the thousands of rescue volunteers who rely on these arrangements.

In addition to our existing base in Doncaster, highly sophisticated surveillance planes will operate from Prestwick and Newquay. This will give the UK much more capability to search for people needing our help over large areas and prevent illegal or anticompetitive activity in UK waters.

Both Doncaster and Prestwick will be operational 24 hours a day, with Newquay operational 12 hours a day all year round. Some of these aircraft can reach the mid-Atlantic, which is the extent of the UK's search and rescue region.

The new service will comprise of:

- 18 helicopters including existing Leonardo AW189s and Sikorsky S92As augmented with the introduction of Leonardo AW139 helicopters
- 6 King Air fixed-wing planes, including the B350, B350ER and the B200
- 1 mobile deployable Schiebel S-100 drone system capable of operating anywhere in the UK

A new state-of-the-art search and rescue helicopter simulation training facility at Solent Airport next to the HM Coastguard Training Facility will house a synthetic rescue hoist and helicopter suspended over a large training pool.

This is a vital addition to training the next generation of technical winch crew. Further innovation throughout the life of the contract will involve the use of uncrewed aircraft and aircraft powered by sustainable aviation fuels.

This is a major investment by the UK government in critical national service which covers a wide range of activity. It protects the services we have come to rely on for years to come.