

[News story: Minister for Africa offers congratulations on Sierra Leone elections](#)

On behalf of Her Majesty's Government, I would like to congratulate President Julius Maada Bio and Vice President Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh of the Republic of Sierra Leone on their electoral success.

I also congratulate the people of Sierra Leone on this peaceful conclusion to a tightly contested election.

The National Electoral Commission and the other electoral management bodies have delivered a credible and transparent process, recognised as such by international and domestic observer missions.

I also pay tribute to former President Ernest Bai Koroma, who steered the country through the terrible Ebola epidemic from 2014 – 2016, for his commitment to a peaceful transition.

The UK now looks forward to developing further the relationship between our countries and working with the new President and his administration to support a bright future for Sierra Leone. I also look forward to welcoming them to the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

[News story: New Royal Navy operations hub opens in Gulf](#)

Prince Andrew Duke of York meets UK personnel at the opening of the United Kingdom Naval Support Facility at Mina Salman port in Bahrain today. Crown copyright

The Naval Support Facility will play a central role in the UK's ability to operate in the region, and will be the hub of the Royal Navy's operations in the Gulf, Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

Gavin Williamson Defence Secretary said:

Our Armed Forces are the face of Global Britain and our presence in Bahrain will play a vital role in keeping Britain safe as well as underpinning security in the Gulf.

Britain is a major player on the world stage and this new Naval Support Facility will help us tackle the growing threats to our nation wherever they are across the globe and protecting our way of life.

The facility will provide an enduring, self-sufficient operating base capable of meeting the needs of any British warship operating in the region including Britain's new aircraft carriers future flagships HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. It will be home to just over 300 British military personnel and supporting civilians, and accommodates up to nearly 550 for short periods. The facility will also provide a key strategic base east of Suez for Britain, its allies and coalition partners.

The ceremony was attended by General Sir Chris Deverell Commander of the UK's Joint Forces Command, Commodore Steve Dainton United Kingdom Maritime Component Commander (UKMCC) and Prince Andrew Duke of York as well as HRH Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa and Field Marshal Khalifa Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Commander in Chief of the Bahrain Defence Force.

Speaking at Mina Salman port, General Sir Chris Deverell Commander Joint Forces Command said:

With the opening of this base, the UK's presence in Bahrain and the wider Gulf is guaranteed into the future, ensuring Britain's sustained deployment east of Suez. In meeting HRH Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa today, I thanked him for the continued support from Bahrain which enables us to operate in the Gulf region.

Bahrain is longstanding British ally and both countries work closely across diplomatic, economic and security matters. What happens in the Gulf region has a direct impact on the national security of the United Kingdom, our prosperity and the safety of our citizens. It is vital that we work with close allies like Bahrain to tackle regional threats such as that posed by Daesh.

[News story: Crescent Moon Visibility for Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr 2018](#)

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[News story: Civil news: CLA market engagement](#)

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) will shortly be inviting tenders to award new Civil Legal Advice (CLA) specialist telephone advice contracts in the discrimination category of law.

CLA provides access to legally aided advice in specified categories of law, including discrimination, for eligible individuals. Most CLA advice is delivered by telephone but in some instances face to face advice may be provided.

The procurement process for CLA discrimination contracts is expected to open in late April, with services under new contracts commencing on 1 September 2018.

Before beginning the tender process, LAA is holding a market engagement event for organisations that may be interested in tendering for this service.

At the event LAA will provide information on:

- the tender process for CLA discrimination contracts
- the CLA service and contract
- the changes we intend to make to how CLA discrimination services currently operate

We will welcome feedback from attendees and will answer questions organisations may have. The market engagement event will be delivered via a web hosted event at 11 am on 16 April. We expect the session to last approximately 1 hour.

Organisations wishing to attend must register by 12 noon on Friday 13 April 2018 to secure their place.

[Register online](#) for LAA market engagement event.

Should a large number of applicants be interested in attending we may need to limit the number per organisation and/or representatives from prospective bidding organisations will be prioritised over third party consultants.

For those who cannot attend this event, information will be published on

LAA's tender pages shortly afterwards.

Further information

Questions or requests to attend should be sent to civil.contracts@justice.gov.uk.

[News story: Jo Johnson: unprecedented new powers for Transport for the North are 'crucial next step'](#)

- Rail Minister attends first Transport for the North Partnership Board in Liverpool
- TfN now hold powers to drive forward long-term strategic transport projects and have proposals considered by government
- Rail Minister will also visit Liverpool Lime Street to see progress on delivering the Great North Rail Project worth well over £1 billion

Jo Johnson is encouraging the north to speak with one 'strong, unified voice' after meeting leaders from across the region in Liverpool today (5 April 2018) to discuss the unprecedented new powers of Transport for the North (TfN).

The Rail Minister called upon northern leaders to drive forward vital transport projects such as Northern Powerhouse Rail after he attended the first meeting [since TfN was legally established as England's first sub-national transport body](#) – backed by £260 million of government funding.

Rail Minister Jo Johnson said:

Between 2015 and 2020 the government will have spent over £13 billion – more than any other in history – to transform northern transport, boosting economic growth and unlocking the incredible potential of the great towns and cities of the north.

Establishing Transport for the North is a crucial next step in giving the north greater influence than ever over transport investment. It is imperative that the north now speaks with a strong, unified voice to identify where we can work together to transform journeys for people.

The fantastic progress on upgrades to Liverpool Lime Street, which will enable more trains every hour and direct services to Scotland, demonstrates our unwavering commitment to delivering the transport

links the north needs.

With significant new powers to drive forward transformative projects like Northern Powerhouse Rail and smart ticketing, I am confident that TfN will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of northern transport.

[Transport for the North promotional video](#)

During his visit to Liverpool Lime Street, Jo Johnson met with Network Rail staff delivering major upgrades to platforms and signalling at the great Victorian station, as part of the Great North Rail Project.

With work to deliver an extra platform to be completed this summer, the upgrade will enable 3 new services per hour in and out of Lime Street.

Patrick Cawley, director of route sponsorship at Network Rail, said:

Our major transformation of Liverpool Lime Street is a key part of the Great North Rail Project, and it will be fantastic to show Rail Minister Jo Johnson what we've done so far and what work is currently being delivered while the station remains open.

Once complete in October this year, passengers will see completely remodelled platforms and 2 brand new platforms, increasing the total number to 10.

Longer, better managed platforms will accommodate longer trains, helping provide more space and seats for passengers. This is vital ahead of the significant increase in passengers expected in the coming years.