

[Press release: Foreign Secretary statement following increased fighting in eastern Ukraine](#)

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Part of:

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has urged restraint following the recent escalation of fighting in eastern Ukraine, and expressed concern about the worsening humanitarian situation.

Recent days have seen a significant increase in fighting in the Donbas, particularly focused around the town of Avdiivka where the Ukrainians have declared a state of emergency.

The Foreign Secretary said:

Over the past few days we have seen a high number of casualties and the humanitarian situation has deteriorated drastically in Avdiivka. Many civilians are without water, electricity and heating while outside temperatures are as low as -20 degrees.

The immediate priority must be security and a full sustained ceasefire, in line with the provisions of the Minsk agreements. I urge all parties to demonstrate restraint, and help facilitate crucial repairs to restore vital utilities and assist the vulnerable. Sanctions against Russia cannot be lifted until the Minsk commitments are fulfilled.

The UK continues to stand by Ukraine in full support of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Further information

[SNP ducks fracking decision for](#)

another year

31 Jan 2017



A decision on the future of shale extraction in Scotland will not be made for another year, it has been confirmed.

Having introduced a ban on fracking at the beginning of 2015, the SNP said today it would now make up its mind “by the end of 2017”.

The official ‘Talking Fracking’ consultation will also wait until after the council elections in May before closing.

It means the Scottish Government will have sat on its hands for three years while other parts of the UK press on with the technology.

Experts have said shale extraction could provide an economic boost for Scotland, as well as create jobs and secure future supplies.

But both the SNP and Labour have dogmatic objections to fracking, even though privately the Scottish Government claims to be sympathetic.

Despite the moratorium on fracking, Scotland currently imports daily shipments of fracked gas from the US to refine at Grangemouth.

Scottish Conservative energy spokesman Alexander Burnett said:

“This is another spineless decision by the SNP on the topic of fracking.

“It should be looking at the potential for an economic boom and a more secure supply of power for people in Scotland.

“But instead, it’s pandering to the left of the party because it doesn’t want to lose votes in May’s council elections.

“It is well-established that fracking can be explored safely and sensitively, yet the Scottish Government seems reluctant to even do that.

“And all the while, Scotland risks losing business surrounding the technology south of the border, where the government is altogether more open-minded on this.”

To see the full document, visit:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00513575.pdf>

The ministerial foreword states: “We will then ask the Scottish Parliament to vote on our recommendation, and we will come to a final decision by the end

of 2017 on whether or not unconventional oil and gas has a role in Scotland's energy mix."

The Scottish Conservatives have long supported the need for exploring fracking north of the border, and opposed the moratorium that was introduced two years ago.

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2015/01/scottish-conservatives-oppose-moratorium-fracking/>

Lord Coe must immediately come back to the Select Committee and clarify his evidence in light of this new information – Allin-Khan

Commenting on the release of emails concerning Lord Coe's alleged knowledge of specific allegations connected to the Russian doping scandal, Rosena Allin-Khan MP, Labour's Shadow Sports Minister said:

"These are very troubling allegations. The release of these emails by the Select Committee cast serious doubts over the evidence previously given by Lord Coe to the inquiry.

"World Athletics is going through one of the most serious doping scandals in its history and requires the strongest possible leadership. Lord Coe must immediately come back to the Select Committee and clarify his evidence in light of this new information.

"He must be honest about which allegations he knew of and when he found out about them. The IAAF and BOA need transparency and honesty throughout their organisations now more than ever, and that has to start at the very top."

Local Government Reform White Paper unveiled by Mark Drakeford

The White Paper, which is out for consultation until the beginning of April, is the result of months of discussions between the Welsh Government, local authorities and others on how to strengthen council services in the face of future challenges. It seeks views on proposals for mandatory regional working

to deliver a range of services, address workforce issues, and implement electoral reform including allowing voting at 16. It also calls on members of the public to become active participants in local democracy and in the design and delivery of services.

Amongst the proposals are a mandatory economic development footprint that would also cover certain planning functions and transport.

Councils would have some flexibility over what footprint they use to share responsibilities for other mandated services including education improvement, social services, additional learning needs, public protection and promotion of the Welsh language.

Councillors would make up the membership of new, enhanced joint committees which would oversee these services and make decisions on behalf of their respective councils. Funding arrangements would work on the existing practice of pooled budgets.

The local government workforce is an essential part of these proposals and the Welsh Government will consider, through the Workforce Partnership Council, how to support the transition over to the new arrangements, using statutory guidance where necessary.

Councils would still have the option of merging under the new plans and, where there is local agreement for this, the Welsh Government would work with them to make it a reality.

The White Paper also calls for a different and more equal partnership between people and the public services they use. This would see the development of a new set of principles recognising people as the best experts in how to manage their own lives and putting in place small interventions earlier to resolve issues before they escalate further.

The proposals strike a new balance between clear and unavoidable objectives for local government with flexibility for councils to determine how those shared objectives are best delivered locally. Thus the White Paper proposals provide councils with powers to choose between operating a Cabinet or Committee system and to decide how the activities of councillors are best reported to the electorate. Similarly, views are invited on enabling local authorities to adopt either 'first past the post' or 'single transferable vote' election systems. Following passage of the Wales Bill, further conversation will take place on a wider set of measures to reform electoral arrangements in Wales to improve both voter registration and turn out at elections.

In line with the new proposals, the Cabinet Secretary also announced that he would be considering how the wider local government finance system could be reformed – ensuring a fairer and more sustainable system to support local authorities in the future.

Setting out the proposals for consultation, the Local Government Secretary said:

“This White Paper is not about change for change’s sake. Our councils are working against a backdrop of extraordinary austerity and some services are facing a great deal of pressure. Local government reform is essential if we’re to make these services stronger and more resilient to cope with the demands of the future.

“The new regional arrangements will bring councils together to work more effectively in the interests of people and their communities.

“We want to see a new relationship between councils and their communities where public services support people to live independent lives and intervene only when necessary and only for as long as is required.

“We also want a new relationship between the Welsh Government and our councils; one that is based on mutual respect for the important, and different, roles we each play.

“Underpinning all of these new arrangements will be effective scrutiny and accountability, where councillors act as the champion, advocate and guide for people who elect them.

“I want to thank local authority leaders and others for their help in forming a serious and credible set of proposals. I look forward to working alongside them further following the local government elections in May.”

The consultation will close on 11th April 2017 and is available to view on the Welsh Government’s website: consultations.gov.wales.

[News story: CMA reviews FirstGroup bus undertakings in Bristol](#)

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The CMA is to review long-standing undertakings covering FirstGroup and local authority tendered bus services in the Greater Bristol area.

The undertakings followed the 1989 merger of local bus companies Badgerline

and Midland Red West which was investigated by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC). The MMC ruled that the merger would remove competition for bus services contracted by the former Avon County Council. Local authorities tender for – and subsidise – unprofitable bus services in order to maintain important transport links for residents.

The merged company was therefore required to sign up to a number of restrictions, including a cap on the amount they could receive from the local authority for running a tendered service – and a requirement to return any excess profit from such services.

These undertakings were amended in 1996 following a subsequent bus merger where both operators became part of FirstGroup.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has now decided to review the undertakings to see if there has been a change in circumstances which justifies their removal or variation.

The CMA is seeking views in particular from local authorities, bus operators and bodies representing bus passengers in the Greater Bristol area. It wants to hear about whether the ability of local authorities to attract competitive bids has changed in the intervening years, whether the growth of other operators has increased competition for tendered bus services and the practical impact of the undertakings.

Responses are invited via the review [case page](#).

The CMA has also today published its [final advice](#) to the secretary of state recommending the removal of remedies in 2 merger cases that followed investigations carried out under the Fair Trading Act.

Today's actions result from the CMA's ongoing programme of work on remedy reviews, initially set out in the CMA's [2015/16 annual plan](#), with the aim of reducing burdens on business by assessing whether past merger and market remedies should be removed or varied when they are no longer necessary. Since its creation in 2014, the CMA has launched 96 remedy reviews, around two-thirds of which have resulted in the removal of the remedy.

For more information see the [remedies review case page](#).