

The Electoral Commission

Angus MacNeil MP
House of Commons
London
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18 October 2010

Dear Mr MacNeil

I am writing to follow up your remarks during last week's Committee Stage debate on the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies (PVSC) Bill as I am aware of some misleading press reports about this matter, which have obviously caused confusion. During the debate you said that:

"The fact that the Electoral Commission has sent guidance to Scotland's 32 local authorities informing them that the referendum will be "the senior poll" is bad news for all of us who respect what happens in the Scottish Parliament."

I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you that the Commission has issued no such guidance, nor has any decision yet been made on the timing of the counts for the referendum on the UK Parliamentary voting system and elections scheduled for 5 May 2011.

In deciding the timing, and order, of the count I will want to rely on two important principles to inform my decision. The first is that voters, candidates and party activists should know the outcome of their elections as soon as possible after the polls have closed, without jeopardising the accuracy of the result. The second is that the result of the referendum should be announced on a UK-wide basis. In the next few weeks I will be setting out my preferred approach to the count so others have a chance to share their views with me before I make my final decision as Chief Counting Officer.

Our priority is to make sure that everyone who goes to the polls on 5 May can cast their vote safely and easily whether it's an election, a referendum or both and this is why we are treating the combination proposals with such seriousness. We will be carefully scrutinising the amendments introducing

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these provisions to the PVSC Bill, and advising Government and Parliament where we are concerned about how they will work in practice.

If you would like to meet to discuss any of this in more detail then please do not hesitate to contact my office. I hope you will understand that in view of the misreporting of this issue, I also intend to place a copy of this letter on our website.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Watson

Jenny Watson
Chair

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