

Sent via e-mail

31 March 2016

Dear Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel member,

## **By-elections on 23 June 2016**

As the date for the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union approaches, I thought it appropriate as Chief Counting Officer for that referendum to write and draw your attention to our views about the holding of any by-elections on the same day as the referendum itself.

It is our view that no Parliamentary or Local Government by-elections should be held on 23 June. It is important that any debate about the UK's membership of the European Union takes place at a time that allows the full participation of voters and campaigners, uncomplicated by competing messages and activity from elections taking place on the same day.

It is equally important that voters and campaigners are able to engage fully with the issues which are relevant at any by-election.

This view had been made very clear to all Counting Officers and Returning Officers

I wanted to make you aware now that UK Parliament has not legislated for any poll to be combined with the poll at the referendum on 23 June. Although this does not mean that a by-election cannot take place on the same day, it does mean that the usual practices followed at combined polls and established in legislation, such as 'shared' polling stations, would not be in place. Separate polling stations and equipment would need to be established for each poll although, if space allowed, they could be located in the same building. This gives rise to potentially significant administrative challenges but more fundamentally, also increases risk of voter confusion.

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I would be grateful if you could make your party colleagues aware of our position. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Lisa Camps in our public affairs team on 020 7271 0619 or [lcamps@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:lcamps@electoralcommission.org.uk) as either Andrew Scallan, the Deputy Chief Counting Officer, or I will be happy to discuss it with you.

I have made a copy of this letter available on the Electoral Commission's website on our 'Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panels' page.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Jenny Watson**  
**Chief Counting Officer and Chair of the Commission**