Dear Joan,

I am writing following the First Minister’s statement this morning to set out briefly why we have made this decision.

As you will know, people in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain within the European Union. Since that vote the Scottish Government has sought to work with the UK Government to protect Scotland’s interests.

In July the First Minister met the Prime Minister and a process was established to seek agreement on the objectives and outcomes for the article 50 negotiations with the European Union, prior to article 50 being triggered.

In December, we published our compromise proposal, Scotland’s Place in Europe, in which we accepted that Scotland would leave the European Union but set out proposals by which Scotland could remain within the European Single Market and the powers of the Scottish Parliament revisited for the post-Brexit landscape.

Despite working extensively through the Joint Ministerial Committee on European Negotiations, which brings together Ministers from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to secure our interests, no progress has been made and there has been no compromise from the UK Government.

As a result we will now take steps to ensure that the people of Scotland will have a choice between the direction being pursued by the UK Government and setting our own direction as an independent nation. That choice will only be put to the people when there is clarity on the emerging outcome of the Brexit negotiations, alongside which we will also set out clear proposals for an independent Scotland.
I will, of course, be happy to further explain this decision at your Committee’s debate on the EU Referendum and its Implications for Scotland on Wednesday 15 March 2017. I am also committed to keeping Parliament and your Committee fully updated and involved as matters progress.

MICHAEL RUSSELL