

ANDREW BOWIE MP

Member of Parliament for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

John Swinney MSP

Scottish Government
St Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
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8 May 2024

Dear John,

I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as First Minister. I look forward to working with you on issues which arise in my constituency, and beyond, for the benefit of all Scots.

On that note, I would like to raise with you the troubling situation that has developed regarding the funding arrangements for the Scottish Men's Sheds Association.

After a regular funding deal expired in 2023, it very much looked like the association based in my constituency had reached the end of its existence.

But following some gentle pressure from members of the public who directly or indirectly benefit from a community 10,000 strong, it was decided by a committee of three Scottish Ministers to kick in a small sum of £75,000 for 2023/24.

This single-year deal expired at the start of this month. The community wealth minister has not indicated any talks to broker another, no one in government seems to be in charge, and the Men's Shed movement is very much at a precipice.

This registered Scottish charity has great holistic benefit services as well as people – social care is less strained, befriending initiatives have a huge ally in SMSA, and our NHS and council budgets definitely feel the benefit of "third way" intervention for loneliness and isolation before more costly cures are required.

I believe you were among the first to hail the creation of the Scottish movement as a Perthshire MSP in 2015. So its immense benefit for communities across Scotland should not be lost on you.

Members fix things, learn new skills, and give others the opportunity to make a difference. Everyone feels useful. It means the unhelpful feeling of "not wanting to be a burden"—a very British attitude—is very much batted away.

I have asked for men's sheds groups in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine to contact me with their own experiences of how membership has improved their lives and the integration of their communities. I will consider how best to anonymise the data and present it to the Scottish Parliament for consideration. It might be instructive for the Scottish Government, MPs and MSPs to conduct their own research in similar ways.

In the meantime, however, a clock is ticking on the existence of the organisation. You have said you are "no caretaker" as first minister – but I ask you to take care of this brilliant and essential part of our communities, and instruct your ministers to collaborate on suitable, long-term funding for SMSA.

Yours truly,



Andrew Bowie MP
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