

ASCC is closing down effective from 30th April 2012

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The Trustees of the Association of Scottish Community Councils are gravely saddened to announce that, as the result of a massive cut in funding by the Scottish Government, the ASCC will be wound up.

The timing of this closure is to allow Community Councils who receive insurance protection via ASCC to remain insured for the whole of the current insurance schedule.

The charitable arm will begin the process for winding up, as required by companies and charity legislation, towards a closing date of 30th April 2012.

The unincorporated arm of the ASCC will cease all activity with immediate effect. The halt in activities of the unincorporated arm has a number of immediate consequences, including the cancellation of all further Regional Meetings, elections, ballots, the Annual National Conference and the quarterly issues of the ASCC Magazine.

The charity will continue to provide minimal support to Community Councils until the winding up process is complete.

The Scottish Government Finance Secretary, Mr John Swinney, offered the ASCC a grant of £30,000 for the current financial year. That was subsequently increased to £40,000, but with strings attached so the money could only be spent on three specific areas. This represents a more than FORTY PERCENT drop in income for the ASCC; the Association's minimum operating requirements for one year are over £70,000. Our financial and legal advisers were unanimous in saying that the ASCC could not operate with such a loss.

The Association is unable to make up the loss of Government income with grants from other funders. The nature of the remit of the ASCC is such that major grant funders will not provide funding to the Association, because it exists to promote and support a part of the statutory sector.

The unincorporated arm is required to cease operating immediately, because the elected representatives of the ASCC are fully liable if it incurs liabilities it has no income to cover.

National Vice President, CClr Bob Kerr said:

“Mr Swinney has purposefully decided to cause the closure of a national charity. The only national organisation representing, promoting and supporting the Community Councils of Scotland. He should be ashamed when he claims to support local democracy, and then attacks the most local tier of elected representation in Scotland.

This seems to have been part of a plan, the precursor of which was a shamefully biased and unprofessional “survey” of ASCC stakeholders. It appears Mr Swinney is using a prejudiced analysis of that flawed opinion poll to justify the closure of a Scottish charity.

1200 Community Councils in Scotland are now without a collective voice, and a national presence. It seems the unkept promises to Community Councils from the Government's 2007 Manifesto were only the beginning. Mr Swinney has just given the best possible gift to the bureaucrats and politicians who have resented and marginalised Community Councils since they were established in 1973.”

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To: All MSPs

6 July 2011

Association of Scottish Community Councils

You will have received yesterday's announcement by the Association of Scottish Community Councils (ASCC) that it intends to cease its work, with final effect by April 2012. The ASCC communication suggests that its decision has been forced as a direct consequence of cuts to its Scottish Government funding.

All MSPs will deal regularly with Community Councils and Community Councillors in their constituencies and I appreciate that both they and you will have questions about the implications of the ASCC decision. For accuracy I should point out that although there is no obligation for Scottish Government to fund the ASCC, it has received around £180,000 in funding from us since 2007/08. For 2011/12, it has been offered £40,000. In 2010/11 it was offered £30,000; plus a maximum of £20,000 match funds for income it secured itself.

This year's funding is offered chiefly to deliver training and development to Community Councils in support of their role as vibrant and active voices for local citizens and communities. I should also say that the offer of £40,000 was increased by £10,000 from an earlier offer made in March, in the light of new information provided by the ASCC about the financial challenges it believed it would face this year.

I recognise the challenges faced by small voluntary sector organisations like the ASCC, which play a fundamental role in community engagement and participation across Scotland. In the last few months we have consistently offered to work with the ASCC to help it strengthen its financial viability, focus on the key strengths it can offer Community Councils, and improve its overall efficiency and effectiveness. That offer remains, although of course I respect the decision the ASCC Board has taken.

The current economic climate, where Scotland faces unprecedented cuts to its overall budget, makes funding decisions like this one even tougher. In this highly challenging environment, the ASCC's funding bid for 2011/12 was handled no differently from other pressing calls on public funds. Its original bid requested £98,000, almost double the amount it received last year.

This case highlights once more the pressing need to secure greater value for money, reduce duplication and think creatively about how we can pool the collective strengths of the public, third and other sectors. The findings of the Christie Commission, published last week and welcomed by this Government, only underline these points more strongly. But in this challenging context, I am also committed to growing and strengthening the role of Community Councils.



JOHN SWINNEY