

Tommy Sheppard to stand for election as SNP Deputy Leader

✘ He may have only been elected as an MP for little over a year, but Tommy Sheppard MP for Edinburgh East is to stand as a candidate in the race to become Deputy Leader.

Sheppard announced his intention earlier this evening on his website where he explained that the crucial role of Deputy Leader of the party would ensure that they are ready for the second referendum when it comes. He continued: “We need to revise how we do things, building on the massive increase in membership since 2014. Members are our biggest asset and we need structures that allow them to get more involved. They are central to our continuing success as a party and a movement.

“We need to prepare as many people as possible to play an active role in campaigns. I believe we need to refocus our basic unit – the party branch – to include much more political discussion and action. We need to spend money on professional organisers – at HQ and in a regional network – to support branch activities and members’ training. We need to bring together all our elected representatives – MPs, MSPs and Councillors – in coherent teams providing political leadership to our communities. We need to rethink how we make policy – involving as many members as possible in a continuous process.

“To work, change must come from the bottom up via a swift but inclusive and comprehensive review. Working with other party officers and the NEC I’d like to lead that process, starting as soon as possible.”

Sheppard admits that he does not have much experience in terms of time served, saying: “I still have a lot to learn: although active in Scottish politics for nearly 40 years, I’ve only been in the SNP since 2014.

“This means I can bring a new perspective to our leadership team. I don’t claim to represent new members, but I am fairly typical of those who have made a political journey in recent years, particularly from the Labour movement. I spent several years working in the Yes campaign building alliances with people across all parties and none. That’s a role we may need to revive, sooner rather than later, and as Depute Leader I would drive that forward.”

Sheppard made one barnstormer of a maiden speech which politics aside is admirable for the fact that he stood for the first time in lofty Westminster and spoke for over 10 minutes without notes:

Nominations for the post close on 5 August 2016 and Mr Sheppard is joined in the contest by Angus Robertson MP who some believe is the favourite. Robertson is already leader of the SNP Westminster group, but has had prominence at PMQs with his measured style.

The other two declared candidates are Chris McEleny who is an Inverclyde councillor and Alyn Smith the ‘veteran’ MEP who has been in Brussels for 10 years.

Smith rose to prominence after the EU Referendum with a passionate speech which received an unprecedented standing ovation in a debate at the European Parliament:

The vacancy was announced earlier in the year when Stewart Hosie MP for Dundee East became embroiled in marital difficulties and a widely publicised affair. He will step down at the SNP conference in the autumn. Hosie defeated Keith Brown and Angela Constance in the 2014 contest to become Deputy Leader of the party.