LETTER TO NEWSLETTER

[Published 8 July and replied to by Cllr Michael Long (Alliance Group leader) on 11 July 2016]

Dear Editor,

 On Monday 4 July, Sinn Fein obtained a special meeting of Belfast City Council to discuss the EU referendum result. A motion was proposed by its leader, Cllr Jim McVeigh, which read, “This Council notes that, whilst England and Wales voted to leave the EU, Northern Ireland/North of Ireland and the voters of Belfast voted to remain … [and] calls upon the Assembly and our First and Deputy First Ministers to engage with the British, Irish and Scottish governments, to find a way to accommodate the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland/North of Ireland to remain a part of the EU.”

 The motion was seconded by the Alliance Party and passed as that party when voting alongside the two nationalist parties (and the Green councillor), has a majority over all the Unionist parties. The ‘People Before Profit’ councillor abstained after pointing out the absurdity of the motion which effectively called for an independent Ulster.

 The EU is composed of sovereign states, which of course means the Sinn Fein/Alliance motion was meaningless and could not happen without Northern Ireland leaving the United Kingdom. In the referendum, we voted as the UK, not as countries or regions, although the result was notified in various ways, mostly by council areas and in our case Westminster constituencies.

 The unit of self-determination chosen for a vote decides the result (in this referendum it was the entirety of the UK). Alliance is declaring that the unit of self-determination is in fact Northern Ireland. By the same logic, in the case of a border poll, Northern Ireland would not necessarily be the unit. Instead each county or constituency could choose whether to stay in the UK or join the Republic.

 Oddly, consultation with Wales was not suggested in the motion, presumably as that country betrayed the anticipated Celtic unanimity.

 The Alliance proposal violates the Belfast Agreement where Northern Ireland’s status is recognised to be part of the UK by the votes in referenda on both sides of the border.

 By seconding this silly and undemocratic motion, Alliance has called for the ‘North of Ireland’ to secede from the United Kingdom. That is a far cry from the party’s origins, and indicates that by allying with Sinn Fein in City Hall, it is on the road to a place quite different from the moderate centre ground it was once proud to occupy.

Yours sincerely

Jeffrey Dudgeon (Cllr.)

Moved by Councillor McVeigh, Seconded by Councillor Nicholl, “This Council notes that, whilst England and Wales voted to leave the EU, Northern Ireland/North of Ireland and the voters of Belfast voted to remain. This Council calls upon the Assembly and our First and Deputy First Ministers to engage with the British, Irish and Scottish governments, to find a way to accommodate the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland/North of Ireland to remain a part of the EU. Belfast is a city built by immigrants and is the home of many immigrants. This Council welcomes and values the contribution of newcomers and immigrants to the economy, society and culture of the city and commits to acting decisively to prevent hate crime and prejudice and to build a city that is open, welcoming and safe for everyone who lives and works here. In the context of Belfast being the regional driver of the economy, the Council will proactively develop further evidence based strategies and actions for achieving its stated policy for inclusive growth during this period of uncertainty and beyond.”