**Jeff Dudgeon: Unionists in Belfast face big challenges so the replacements for two departing DUP councillors will need to be good**

**The news that Councillor David Graham of the DUP has been appointed to the role of head of communications and media relations for Rangers at Ibrox Park has come as a surprise.**

Dear Editor,

The news that Councillor David Graham of the DUP has been appointed to the role of head of communications and media relations for Rangers at Ibrox Park has come as a surprise.

This means Belfast has lost two DUP councillors within a fortnight. Mr Graham was even deputy leader of the group, and Alderman Guy Spence, a one-time deputy Lord Mayor.

I have to say the DUP group at City Hall since the May election was not strong to start with, even though they went from 13 to 15 councillors. Their replacements had better be top of the range and not place-men or novelties.

I say this having served five years as a UUP councillor for Balmoral, until my defeat by the DUP. I was the only Ulster Unionist taken out by that party where so many of my colleagues fell to the Green Party and Alliance.

I am disappointed that David Graham is deserting the people of Balmoral - be they in Finaghy, Belvoir, Taughmonagh and Malone - having represented them for less than a year.

Only last May, his literature was warning electors that if they didn't vote DUP, a nationalist might win one of the Unionist seats in Balmoral, yet before (and after the count) there were still over two Unionist quotas. This fakery was all to defeat me, leaving Balmoral with two DUP councillors, neither of whom have made much of a mark since.

Ironically, that three LGBT councillors, two of them women and two Unionists, lost their seats did not disturb many who complain so bitterly on social media about unionist bigotry.

Last week, the Department for Infrastructure Minister, Nichola Mallon MLA, chose the four new municipal representatives for the Belfast Harbour Commission from amongst names submitted by the council.

They were Cllrs Ciaran Beattie, to serve a second term, Donal Lyons, Mal O’Hara, and Emmet McDonough-Brown who represent Sinn Fein, the SDLP, and the Green and Alliance Parties respectively. Without a squeak from the DUP, their nominee was ignored and now there isn't a single Unionist among the four selected.

The UUP’s Alderman Sonia Copeland also lost her place, in a move that smacks of political discrimination.

I wish David well in his career-move but worry as the city faces a deep financial crisis, one I constantly warned about, given the city's collapsing rates income from retail sources.

There are now few councillors left who can try to hold the line against squander and identitarianism, let alone sectarianism.

Jeffrey Dudgeon

26 March 2020

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/opinion/columnists/jeff-dudgeon-unionists-belfast-face-big-challenges-so-replacements-two-departing-dup-councillors-will-need-be-good-2519238>

Scottish Sun story

<https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/sport/football/5392978/rangers-orange-order-dup-david-graham-pr/>

The Daily Record has a hatchet job on the appointment.