

South Belfast a sticking point for DUP/UUP pact

NEGOTIATIONS over an electoral pact between the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party are at a "very sensitive stage", according to informed sources in both parties.

An agreement to field single unionist candidates in East Belfast, South Belfast and Fermanagh South Tyrone is close although there remains a gulf between the two parties over the South Belfast candidate.

It's virtually certain that the UUP will field a candidate against the DUP's David

Simpson in the Upper Bann constituency.

In South Belfast the most likely unionist candidate is high-profile gay activist Jeff Dudgeon although the DUP has not agreed to this proposal so far. Another possible candidate for the unionist nomination is Rodney McCune, Danny Kennedy's Special Adviser who contested East Antrim in the 2010 Westminster contest.

One UUP source said "Gavin Robinson in East Belfast and Tom Elliott in Fermanagh South

Tyrone are literally agreed but the South Belfast candidate situation isn't resolved yet. The DUP is waiting to see who the Ulster Unionist Party's Constituency Association selects in the next couple of days.

"Dudgeon appears to be in pole position but there is a bit of a lobby for Rodney McCune for South Belfast. Traditionalist DUP strategists apparently aren't entirely thrilled by the prospect of Jeff being selected."

Elsewhere the parties have not

agreed on the North Belfast seat having a single Unionist candidate which could damage Nigel Dodds' prospects and sources within the UUP say it is certain that Jo-Anne Dobson will stand against the DUP's David Simpson in Upper Bann. "Joanne feels she has a more than good chance of winning the seat.

"She's vivacious, photogenic and a very capable representative. She could be the one to recapture David Trimble's old seat", a party source said.



AGREED: Robinson

IN THE RUNNING: Jeff Dudgeon