**MICHAEL LONG: ‘JEFF DUDGEON DISPLAYS HIS IGNORANCE OF HOW COUNCIL WORKS’**

**News Letter**

**24 August 2017**

Having had his lack of knowledge on council procedures on the issue of calling special meetings thoroughly exposed both on the floor of the chamber and in my response, one would have thought that Councillor Jeff Dudgeon might have spent some time reading up on how the council works before writing another letter displaying his ignorance on a whole range of new council matters (‘I don’t dislike Alliance, I disagree with a party that preaches consensus yet rushes to back partisan SF policies,’ Aug 15).

I suppose his bizarre personal vendetta against Alliance has proven too hard to overcome as demonstrated in his first accusation that Alliance is to blame for violence around anti-internment bonfires. I would instead suggest that those involved in the violence are responsible.

Firstly, he states unionist councillors do not have the power to end existing policy as they are in a minority. Of course, had he any knowledge of how the party group leaders’ forum works, he would know there are three unionist parties and three others on the forum, and so unionists can block decisions.

Secondly, he also states Alliance is blocking a memorial to victims of the Belfast Blitz. He knows this is not the case and, that as someone who had relatives who served the city during that time and whose father was born on the first night of the blitz, it is hardly likely to be the case. He knows the decision on this and other memorials is to be discussed by party leaders and then go to committee and perhaps he should be asking other parties why they have continually delayed the matter being discussed when I have asked for it to be on the agenda, including as recently as last week.

Finally, he suggests we rush to support Sinn Fein policies. Any objective look at city hall, would show that we decide our positions based on our own principles, voting with policies rather than on a sectarian outlook. That means that we have voted with unionists on issues like local plans and Irish language street signage policy.

Michael Long,

Alliance leader, Belfast City Council

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/your-say/michael-long-jeff-dudgeon-displays-his-ignorance-of-how-council-works-1-8120269>

**JEFFREY DUDGEON RESPONSE**

Dear Editor

Cllr. Michael Long, the leader of the Alliance Party in City Hall, avers in his responding letter of 8 August that I am mistaken over the special council meeting on bonfires but fails to explain why. Events since he wrote have however proved me right and made his bleatings seem even more irrelevant.

If the Alliance Lord Mayor had refused the Sinn Fein request for a special meeting on the grounds that it was unnecessary and thus, at least, postponed it, we would have avoided the violence and arson around the anti-internment bonfires in nationalist areas of Belfast. The issue would not have been so well publicised or toxic and council officials, who had exactly the same powers in August 2017 - before and after the special meeting - as they had in August 2016 should again have been able to remove material without hindrance. Now no contractor will take the job in future Augusts where none is willing in July.

I don’t have a personal dislike for Alliance, as he writes, I have political disagreements with a party that preaches consensus yet, in council, rushes to support partisan or plain dangerous Sinn Fein policies. It also disturbs me that Cllr. Long believes I am “carrying out a bizarre personal vendetta against  Alliance,” and find his wording disappointing. In relation to personal, he may have noticed that every Unionist councillor has opposed his bonfire policy. That is not a vendetta. That is politics.

I will say I have been disappointed by his actions in bringing about the removal of the council’s Diversity Working Group, of which I was chair, mid-way through the Decade of Centenaries, and his blocking of a memorial to the 1,000 victims of the 1941 Belfast Blitz at City Hall which I proposed and which council supported. Now that is bizarre from an Alliance Party leader. Indeed he seems to be the one in vendetta mode.

Cllr. Long misses the point about me describing the calling of a special meeting as ‘costly’. I was referring to the time, money and effort by officials, and indeed councillors, required to put it together and to attend.

He writes that “the amended motion was to restore the existing powers of council. The only reason this meeting was even needed in the first place was due to the refusal of unionist councillors to support the continuation of that policy.” This is completely false. Unionist councillors, who are in a minority, do not and did not have the power to end the pre-existing policy. When Sinn Fein ramped up the issue and stopped certain remedial measures, we supported alternate efforts to restrict the size and extent of bonfires on council property. The Long-supported motion contained the fantasy that officials were being given the power to go round willy-nilly collecting bonfire material. But council still has limited legal powers and in the short term can only ever exercise them with consent. Once the issue was exacerbated that consent vanished.

In any other political forum, resignation after such a fiasco would be the order of the day when, instead of discreet removal of bonfire material, by virtue of the issue being ramped up, we did not have oversized bonfires, we had buildings and cars set on fire. Councillor Long should review his leadership position.

Yours sincerely

Jeffrey Dudgeon (UUP Councillor)

**THE COUNCIL BONFIRE MOTION WAS INDEED URGENT**

News Letter Tuesday 8 August 2017

*Even if the Lord Mayor had refused to hold the special meeting of Belfast City Council on bonfires, her powers in such circumstances only extend to postponing it.*

In relation to Councillor Jeff Dudgeon’s recent letter (Alliance needlessly facilitated Sinn Fein provocation and cynicism over bonfires, August 3) about last week’s debate at Belfast City Council on bonfires, he is mistaken in several instances and appears to have allowed his personal dislike of Alliance to cloud the facts.

The Lord Mayor was presented with a requisition by Sinn Fein, which was then submitted to Belfast City Council’s solicitor, who determined it competent to be issued. Even if she refused to hold the meeting, her powers in such circumstances only extend to postponing it, so it would have taken place at a later date anyway. Once the Council solicitor ruled it as competent, there was no need to delay it. Lord Mayors act in accordance with advice from council officers and not in a party political way. At least, Alliance Lord Mayors do, I can’t speak for those from Councillor Dudgeon’s party.

Councillor Dudgeon claims it was a “costly exercise,” which was addressed at the meeting itself. Council officers ruled this was not the case, so either Councillor Dudgeon wasn’t listening or he refused to accept that advice from officials.

Although Councillor Dudgeon might not think it, the motion was indeed urgent, as bonfire materials are currently being gathered by some in so-called nationalist areas to mark internment. In fact, the amended motion was to restore the existing powers of council. The only reason this meeting was even needed in the first place was due to the refusal of unionist councillors to support the continuation of that policy.

If, as mentioned in his letter, Councillor Dudgeon does not believe some dangerous bonfires need removed due to environmental protection, he has not been paying attention to the numerous concerns raised in many quarters in the lead-up to both July and August bonfires. Alliance supports respectful and safe expressions of culture. It is strange and rather concerning others appear to not do so. Rather than carrying out a bizarre personal vendetta against Alliance, I call on Councillor Dudgeon to accept the facts and show some leadership.

Councillor Michael Long, Alliance Group Leader, Belfast City Council

[http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/your-say/michael-long-the-council-bonfire-motion-was-indeed-urgent-1-8093527](Read%20more%20at:%20http:/www.newsletter.co.uk/news/your-say/michael-long-the-council-bonfire-motion-was-indeed-urgent-1-8093527)

Dear Editor,

I write in response to Cllr Michael Long's letter (8th August) where he justifies the Alliance Party’s support for Sinn Fein’s bonfire motion at the recent special Council meeting while attacking my colleague Cllr. Jeff Dudgeon.

Mr Long’s party claims to stand for the principle of respect for cultural diversity but has little appetite for engaging those hard-to-reach communities who have experienced the cultural aggression waged on them by Republicans. Instead he repeatedly sides with Sinn Fein in City Hall.

Alliance style themselves as being a party for all, yet have continually demonstrated that they are a party for one side and not the other. Some commentators, like the shrewd Ruth Dudley Edwards, writing in another local paper, observed: "Alliance and Sinn Fein are working together closely on Belfast City Council" (Belfast Telegraph, 10 April 2017, Opinion). That sadly is the truth of the matter.

While the violence associated with the protests against the removal of the flag from City Hall in 2012 must be condemned, most of these protests were peaceful. Yet Alliance has continually aimed only at the Unionist community. Bonfires are just another example.

While one cannot defend bonfires situated in close proximity to property, attacking those who build them is not the way forward. Many community workers are engaged in positive work to secure positive outcomes. Much of this work is not recognised. In fact, a number of bonfires outside the Council's Bonfire Management Programme last year came on board this year, only for Alliance to unsettle the relationships established with the bonfire builders by their votes.

Like them or loathe them, bonfires are a historic part and parcel of the Unionist tradition as they mark events that secured freedom over tyranny on these islands. The Alliance approach takes the lead from Sinn Fein, who are eager to unsettle the Unionist and Loyalist community.

The Council and its officers have diligently worked for many years in the background to tackle the negative connotations associated with bonfires, yet Alliance have once again aided and abetted Sinn Fein in disturbing the equilibrium. They have only made matters worse and left the Council in a vulnerable and compromising position helping to put Belfast back in the headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Despite Alliance and Sinn Fein, the 11th and 12th July this year passed without any major incident. Perhaps that achievement so annoyed that party who abetted by Alliance called an unnecessary Council meeting which simply ramped up the crisis. The fruits of their labours backfired given the scenes of violence and destruction witnessed this week in the Markets, Divis and New Lodge areas of Belfast.

Yours sincerely

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/ruth-dudley-edwards/alliance-styles-itself-the-voice-of-reason-but-is-a-leading-force-of-intolerance-on-city-council-35608170.html>

<https://minutes3.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/g8258/Printed%20minutes%2023rd-Jun-2017%2009.30%20Strategic%20Policy%20and%20Resources%20Committee.pdf?T=1>