

Candidate: Bob Stoker

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**By Noel McAdam** – 05 February 2015

**Unionist hopes of winning back South Belfast in the general election have been dealt a blow as it emerged Ukip is to run a candidate.**

The move is a boost for sitting MP and SDLP leader Alasdair McDonnell, who has been told Sinn Fein will not stand aside to give him a clear run.

There has been speculation the DUP could stand aside in the south of the city to boost the prospects of an Ulster Unionist candidate, in return for the UUP staying out of East Belfast.

DUP leader Peter Robinson has made clear his number one priority is to regain his former East Belfast seat lost to Alliance deputy leader Naomi Long at the last election.

In the south city constituency the UUP has still to choose between Jeffrey Dudgeon and Rodney McCune, although a decision is thought to be imminent.

But the Ukip standard-bearer is likely to be veteran Belfast councillor Bob Stoker, who hopes the two main unionist parties would allow him to run unopposed.

Mr Stoker defected to Ukip from the Ulster Unionists last October, claiming his former party had "lost touch with its grassroots" under the leadership of Mike Nesbitt.

He has run in many elections in the constituency, with mixed fortunes, but said: "I very much believe I can be a unifying force in south Belfast, and not just in terms of unionism.

"Everything in Northern Ireland gets reduced to sectarianism and I am trying to get the sectarian arguments set aside."

Mr Stoker, who served on the city council for 20 years until last May, said he believed Ulster Unionists could not win the seat even if the DUP stood aside.

Electoral pact talks between the DUP and UUP could also result in the UUP withdrawing from the North Belfast contest to increase the prospects of DUP deputy leader Nigel Dodds retaining the seat.