**UUP PARTY OFFICER CANDIDATE SPEECH – JEFFREY DUDGEON**

**SATURDAY 11 MARCH 2016**

Fellow members; ladies and gentlemen,

I am seeking your vote this morning, to become one of our three elected party officers, for the following reasons:

But first may I say, standing is, in no way, a criticism of my esteemed colleagues and fellow candidates.

However, the party officer base needs broadened and diversified.

The Belfast voice is largely absent, and it shows in our electoral performance in the greater urban area.

The city’s boundaries remain weak after the DUP gerrymander; our population insufficient.

Since my unexpected election, in 2014, for the Balmoral area on Belfast City Council, I have worked to progress four major policies, as well as becoming chairman of the Council’s Diversity Working Group. That involves resisting, as best I can, the erosion of the City Hall’s British heritage.

The four policies, pursued with some success are:

* reducing burglary levels though more focussed policing (as a member of the DPCSP);
* developing the proposal for a city centre art gallery as a major tourist and cultural attraction;
* addressing the scourge of graffiti that is blighting our streetscape - a responsibility councils are evading;
* and, lastly, ensuring a large scale monument in the City Hall grounds to the 1,000 victims of the 1941 air raids. The Belfast Blitz's 75th anniversary is next month, which is why I successfully sought a commemorative service in St Anne's Cathedral for Sunday 17 April - for all citizens.

The Ulster Unionist Group on Belfast City Council rightly voted against a rates increase last month, despite serious opposition from the Alliance Party and Sinn Fein, and we will not flinch from doing the same again.

High rates are harming retail, and deterring business generally. They need reduced, not heightened. That way more revenue will ultimately be generated.

There is a need to increase Ulster Unionist Party membership from all sections of the community, by means of a significant and innovative campaign, thereby revitalising constituency associations.

The party's rules and standing orders must also be reviewed and improved, as well as clarifying the confusing voting arrangements. We have had too much contention in selection recently.

I would also work to achieve a proper and reasonable balance between associations and the party leadership, in the interests of getting the best local candidates nominated; remembering always how arrangements with other Unionist parties may be necessary, indeed vital, in Westminster contests. Disputes however can and should be minimised - with the party duly strengthened.

As chairman of the South Belfast Ulster Unionist Association, and someone with wide administrative experience, I believe, if elected, I can play a valuable role, as a Party Officer and ask for one of your three votes.

Thank you.

Result: Alexander Redpath 247 votes, George White 242, Stephen Nicholl 187, elected and Jeff Dudgeon 130 (not elected)