



# Borderwise:

## Government

This information sheet provides general overview of how government operates in Northern Ireland.



## Who governs Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and comprises the six northern counties of the island of Ireland. The UK Government is directly responsible for certain aspects of government in Northern Ireland and this responsibility is largely exercised by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Office. Other aspects of government are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.



## The Northern Ireland Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly is a devolved Parliament which has been set up to legislate for some of Northern Ireland's domestic affairs. It has 108 members (six members are elected from each UK parliament constituency). They are called Members of the Legislative Assembly or MLAs.



## Powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly has responsibility for all matters which have not been retained by Westminster. It has full legislative and executive authority – that is, the power to make laws and take decisions on all the functions of the Northern Ireland Departments. These include the following:-

- Health
- Education and training
- Local government
- Social work
- Housing
- Economic development
- Transport
- Law and home affairs
- The environment
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Sport and the arts
- Statistics, public registers and records.

## Executive Committee

The party or parties with the majority of seats in the Assembly forms the Northern Ireland government, known as the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is made up of:-

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- The First Minister - the head of the Executive Committee and the equivalent of the Prime Minister in the UK Parliament
- The Deputy First Minister - to assist the First Minister
- Ministers of the Legislative Assembly - appointed by the d'Hondt mechanism. Each Minister has a particular area of responsibility (known as a portfolio)
- Junior Ministers - appointed by the First and Deputy First Ministers to assist them with government business

There continues to be a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the UK Cabinet at Westminster. Her/his role is to work with the Northern Ireland Assembly and represent the interests of Northern Ireland in the UK Parliament.

## The Northern Ireland Office

The Northern Ireland Office is a UK government department and is the office of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State represents Northern Ireland in the UK Cabinet. The UK government through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is directly responsible for a number of issues.

## Powers retained by Westminster

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland remains responsible for Northern Ireland Office matters not devolved to the Assembly. These include the following:-

- Policing
- Security policy
- Prisons
- Criminal Justice
- International Relations
- Taxation
- National Insurance
- Regulation of Financial Services
- Regulation of Telecommunications and Broadcasting

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