

## Scrutiny Explained – Northern Ireland Assembly

### KEY:

N: Narrator

N: One of the central roles of the Northern Ireland Assembly is to scrutinise the work of the Executive Committee and hold it to account.

All Executive Bills must pass through the Assembly's legislative process. They are debated in the Chamber, and scrutinised in Committees. Both Committees and MLAs can propose amendments. When a Bill is passed and becomes an Act, the Assembly monitors Executive progress on its implementation.

Statutory Committees shadow Ministers and Departments, monitoring their spending, policies, and decisions. Chairpersons are usually from a different political party than the Departmental Minister. Committees have powers to send for papers and call Ministers and Departmental Officials to meetings. They investigate Executive Bills and can propose their own amendments. They can hold Inquiries into issues, making recommendations and putting pressure on the Ministers to act.

MLAs question Ministers during plenary meetings, following Ministerial Statements and during Question Time. Ministers do not know all questions in advance. MLAs can also submit up to five written questions per day. By raising issues of concern during debates, MLAs shine a light on Ministerial performance. Committee and Private Members' motions call for Executive action. Outside the Chamber, MLAs will raise constituents' concerns with Ministers and seek resolutions.

All parties and Independent MLAs not in the Executive take on an opposition role. An Official Opposition is formed if a party, or parties, entitled to sit on the Executive Committee decline to do so and become the Official Opposition. An Official Opposition is entitled to extra resources and rights.

Official Opposition, unofficial opposition, questions, and Committee powers are significant tools that the Assembly possesses to hold the Executive to account. The important question is: how effective are they?