

Welcome Key Stage 3/4

KEY:

N: Narrator

(MUSIC)

N: The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive were set up following the 1998 Belfast Agreement, also known as the Good Friday Agreement.

Powers were transferred from the UK Parliament to allow decisions and laws to be made at a local level in Northern Ireland. This is called 'devolution'.

There are 90 'Members of the Legislative Assembly', or MLAs – with five elected from each of Northern Ireland's 18 constituencies. The Northern Ireland Assembly meets in Parliament Buildings, Belfast.

The Executive, which meets nearby in Stormont Castle, is made up of Ministers from different parties. It's a power-sharing style of government led by two people – the First Minister and deputy First Minister. One is unionist and the other nationalist, and they have equal status. Other Ministers lead government departments to deliver public services like healthcare, education and justice. In general, the more MLAs a party has, the more Ministers it is entitled to.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has three main roles:

- The first is to legislate, or make laws. A Bill is a proposal for a new law. Bills are scrutinised then voted on by MLAs in the Assembly Chamber. The Bills that pass become law and are known as Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Second, the Assembly holds the Executive to account. As well as scrutinising Executive Bills, MLAs ask Ministers questions about their plans and decisions. They do this in the Assembly Chamber, in committee meetings, and through written questions.
- Third, MLAs split their time between working in Parliament Buildings and their constituency office, where they're available to talk to constituents and address their concerns.

There are many ways to get involved in the democratic process and influence the Assembly and Executive's decisions. Charities and community groups lobby Ministers and MLAs: they ask for meetings, give evidence to committees, and campaign on issues.

And by voting in an Assembly election, we have the power to choose who makes the decisions about how Northern Ireland is run.