

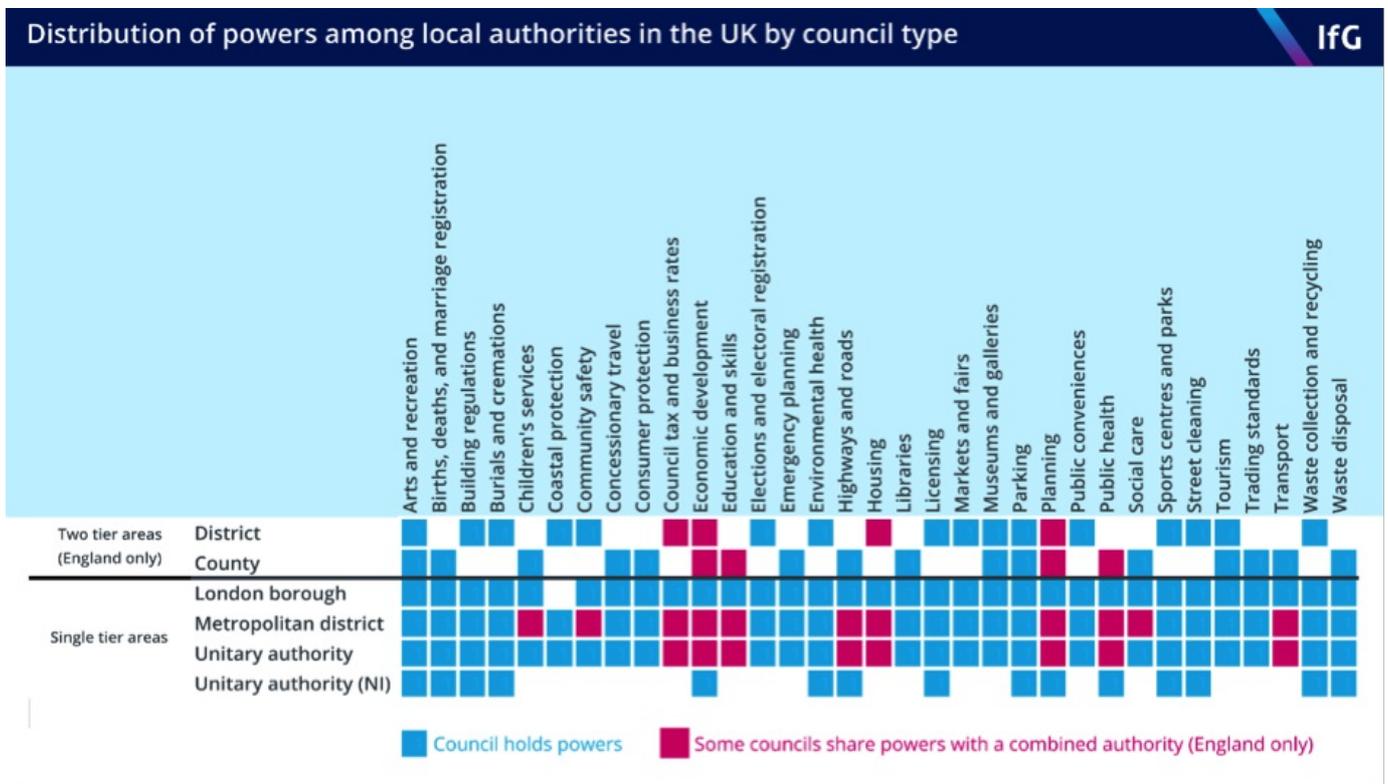
## Local government



### What does local government do?

In England, Scotland, and Wales, councils are responsible for social care and provide some aspects of transport, housing, and education. They are also in charge of a range of neighbourhood services including libraries and waste collection.

Local government in Northern Ireland is more limited. Councils provide some neighbourhood services such as waste collection and street cleaning. However, they are not responsible for education, libraries, or social care.



Source: Institute for Government analysis of House of Commons Library, *Local government in England: structures report*, April 2018. Combined authority data sourced from House of Commons Library, *Devolution to local government in England report*, May 2019. Data for Northern Ireland drawn from the [nidirect website](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) [[www.nidirect.gov.uk](#)], *local council responsibilities*, May 2019. Data for Scotland sourced from Scottish Parliament, *Local government in Scotland research briefing*, August 2016. Data for Wales drawn from Welsh Local Government Association [[www.wlga.wales](http://www.wlga.wales)], *local government in Wales webpage*, and analysis of individual council websites, May 2019.

### Distribution of powers among local authorities in the UK (Updated: 06 Jun 2019) <sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>[4]</sup>

### How are local councillors elected? <sup>[5]</sup>

In England, councillors are elected on four-year terms to single or multi-member wards using the first past the post <sup>[6]</sup> electoral system. Council seats are elected altogether every four years (in 68% of councils); by thirds three years out of every four (30%); or in halves every two years <sup>[7]</sup> (2%).

In Scotland, councillors are elected to multi-member wards via single transferable vote <sup>[6]</sup>, a proportional voting system which allows voters to rank candidates. Councils are normally elected as a whole every four years. In 2015, the Scottish Parliament extended the franchise in local elections to 16- and 17-year-olds.

In Wales, councillors are elected to single and multi-member wards using first past the post, and councils come up for election as a whole every four years. The Welsh Assembly has recently voted to extend the local franchise <sup>[8]</sup> – as in Scotland – to 16- and 17-year-olds.

In Northern Ireland, councillors are elected via single transferable vote to multi-member electoral areas. All councillors are elected every four years.

## How is local government funded? <sup>[9]</sup>

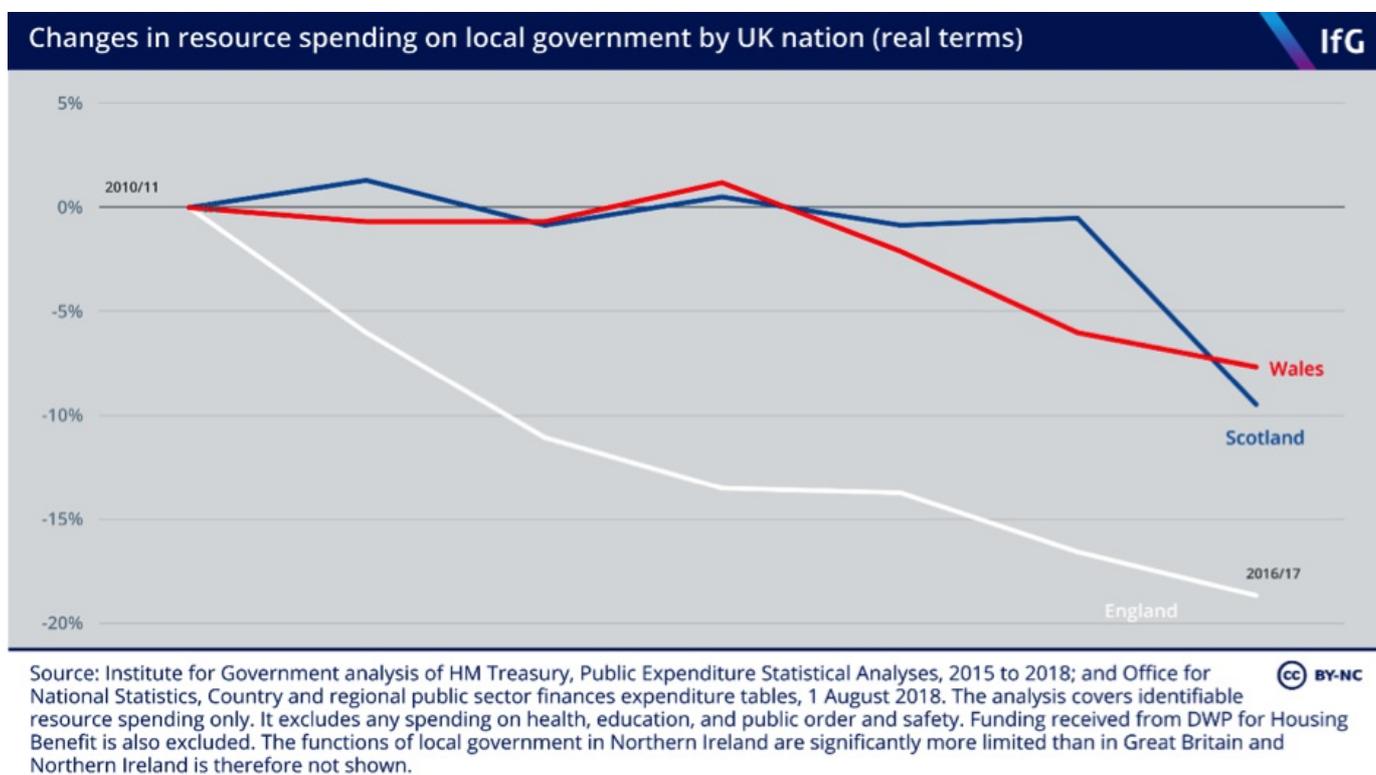
In 2017/18 <sup>[10]</sup>, councils in England were funded by central government grants (54%), council tax (30%), and business rates revenues (16%). The Government has committed to <sup>[11]</sup> phasing out central grants in the near future, whilst allowing councils to retain a greater share of revenues from business rates. This means that English councils will be more reliant on revenues raised locally.

Scottish councils <sup>[12]</sup> were funded by the Scottish government's General Revenue Grant (39%), business rate revenues (15%), council tax (13%), and service income including fees and housing grants (33%). Holyrood has increased <sup>[13]</sup> council tax for by highly-valued households while reducing revenue <sup>[14]</sup> funding, meaning that Scottish councils are becoming more reliant on local taxation.

Welsh local authorities received the majority of their funding (65%) from the Welsh government in 2017-18 <sup>[15]</sup>, compared to 19% from council tax and 16% from business rates revenues.

Spending <sup>[16]</sup> on local government has fallen across the UK, but to a varying extent between the nations. After 2010-11, councils in England cut spending by roughly 19% between 2010/11 and 2016/17 – ten percentage points more than in Scotland and Wales.

Councils in Northern Ireland are funded differently. They draw their income from district rates (69%) <sup>[17]</sup>, which are a property tax like council tax, as well as grants from the Northern Ireland Executive (8%) and fees for services including building control and waste collection (23%).



Changes in resource spending on local government by UK nation (Updated: 06 Jun 2019) <sup>[19]</sup>

<sup>[20]</sup>

<sup>[21]</sup>

## What is the structure of local government in England? <sup>[22]</sup>

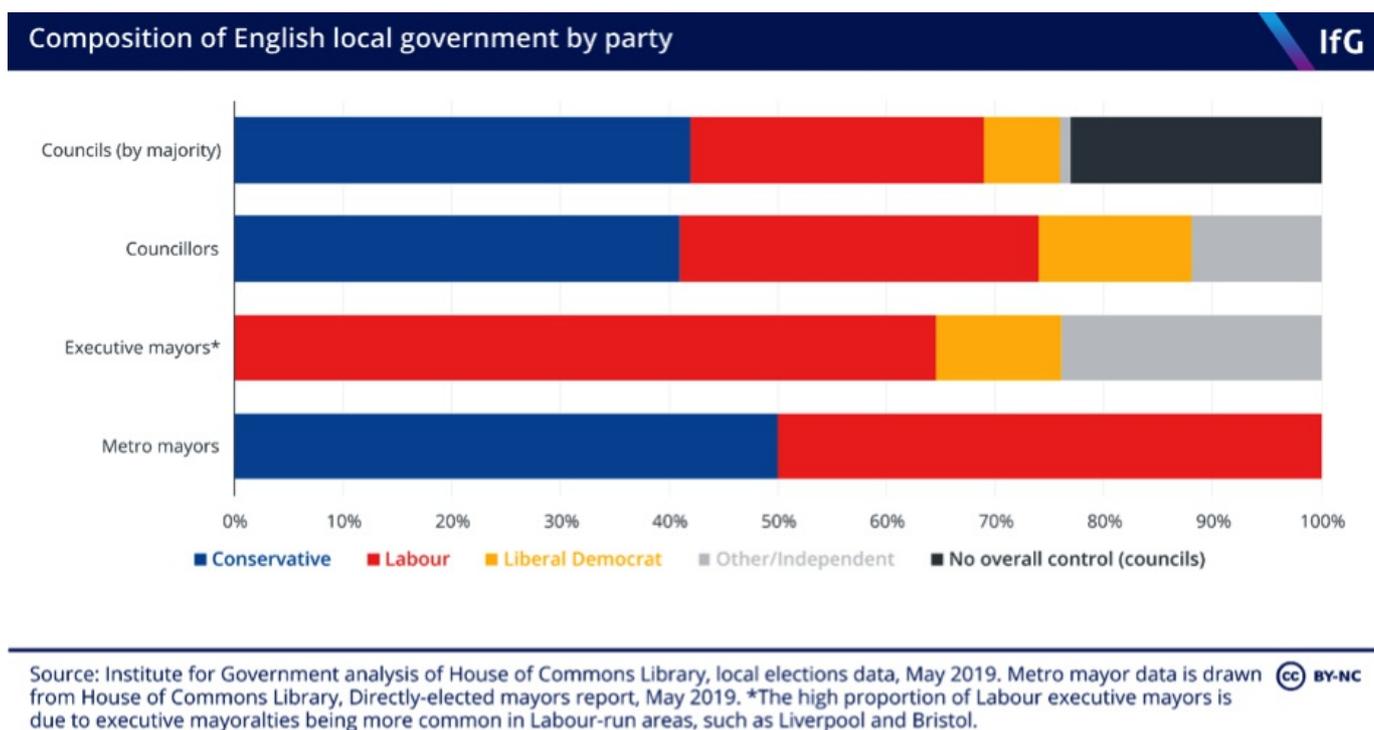
There are 343 local authorities in England. The structure of government varies between them. They cover:

- **Two-tier areas, where authorities share local government functions.** These areas are covered by county councils and district councils. There are 26 county councils, which provide social care and some aspects of transport and education. The counties are sub-divided into 192 district councils, which manage neighbourhood services like waste collection.
- **Single-tier areas, where one authority carries out all local government functions.** These areas comprise the 32 London boroughs, 36 metropolitan districts (including in areas like Greater Manchester and the West Midlands), and 55 unitary authorities such as Bristol and North East Lincolnshire.

Most local authorities in England are run by a leader and cabinet from councillors of the majority party or a coalition of parties in cases of no overall control. Other authorities use a committee system <sup>[23]</sup>, in which decision-making is delegated to committees of councillors from all parties. Budgetary decisions in these cases must still receive the support of a majority of councillors. Across England, 77% of councils have one-party majorities <sup>[24]</sup> while 23% have no overall control.

Fifteen English local authorities, including those in Bristol, Liverpool, and Watford, have transferred leadership powers to executive mayors. Mayors are elected via the supplementary vote system, which allows voters to choose their first and second-preference candidates.

The Conservatives currently have the most councillors in England (42%), followed by Labour (33%) and the Liberal Democrats (14%).



Composition of English local government by party (Updated: 06 Jun 2019) [26]

[27]

[28]

### **What are combined authorities and 'devolution deals'?** [29]

Some local authorities in England have chosen to share their powers with their neighbours, in order to coordinate services.

In these cases, shared powers have been transferred to an entity called a combined authority, led by councillors from each local authority. There are currently ten combined authorities.

In eight areas [30], the combined authority is led by a metro mayor elected via supplementary vote [6], including in the North of Tyne, Sheffield City Region and Greater Manchester.

In all but two cases, combined authorities have agreed devolution deals with central government, in which Westminster transferred additional powers and budgets.

Most deals include an investment fund and some powers over transport and skills, although some combined authorities have been given additional powers:

- The deal agreed for Greater Manchester included powers to integrate health and social care services and devolved responsibility for police and crime;
- The West of England deal included access to additional housing grants and planning powers;
- The North of Tyne deal did not include transport powers and instead focused on powers and funding tied to skills training and business-support services.

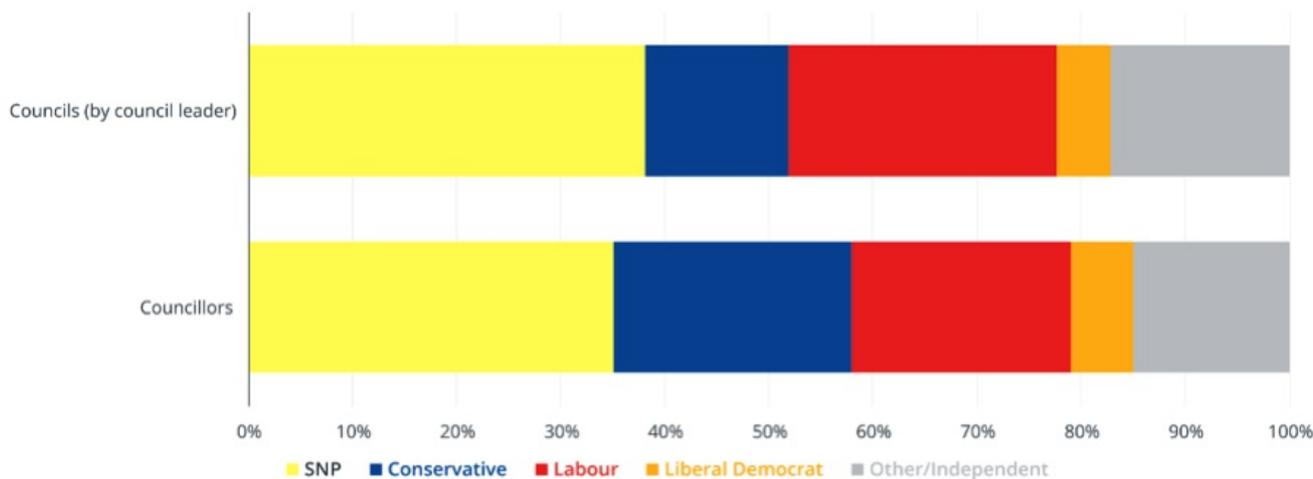
Only one deal has been agreed without a combined authority. This is with Cornwall Council – a unitary authority – and the deal devolved some powers over transport and health.

### **What is the structure of local government in Scotland?** [31]

There are 32 local authorities in Scotland and they are all unitary authorities. Scottish councils are led by a council leader and cabinet as well as a provost – a ceremonial figurehead – chosen from and elected by their councillors.

The Scottish Government is currently holding a review of local governance [32], exploring how to improve local democracy by increasing capacity for community decision-making and public governance.

At the 2017 local elections, the SNP took the most seats (35%) [33], followed by the Conservatives (23%) and Labour (21%). There are only three Scottish councils with majority control, all of which are run by independents. All others are run by coalitions or minority administrations.



Source: Institute for Government analysis of House of Commons Library, local elections data, May 2017; council leader data drawn from Institute for Government analysis of individual council websites, May 2019.

Composition of Scottish local government by party (Updated: 06 Jun 2019) <sup>[35]</sup>

<sup>[36]</sup>

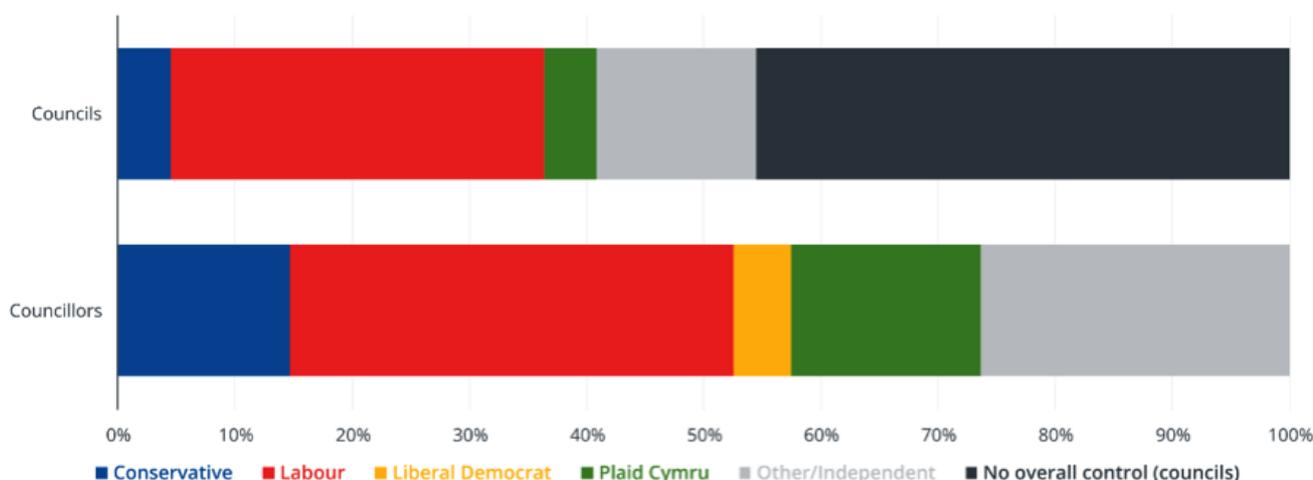
<sup>[37]</sup>

**What is the structure of local government in Wales?** <sup>[38]</sup>

There are 22 local authorities in Wales. They are all unitary authorities led by a leader and cabinet elected by the council itself.

As in Scotland, future reform is likely. The Welsh Government is exploring <sup>[39]</sup> council mergers and further devolution from Cardiff, although these plans have faced opposition in some areas.

Labour have the largest number of councillors in Wales (38%) <sup>[40]</sup>, followed by independents (26%) and Plaid Cymru (16%).



Source: Institute for Government analysis of House of Commons Library, local elections data, May 2017.

Composition of Welsh local government by party (Updated: 06 Jun 2019) <sup>[42]</sup>

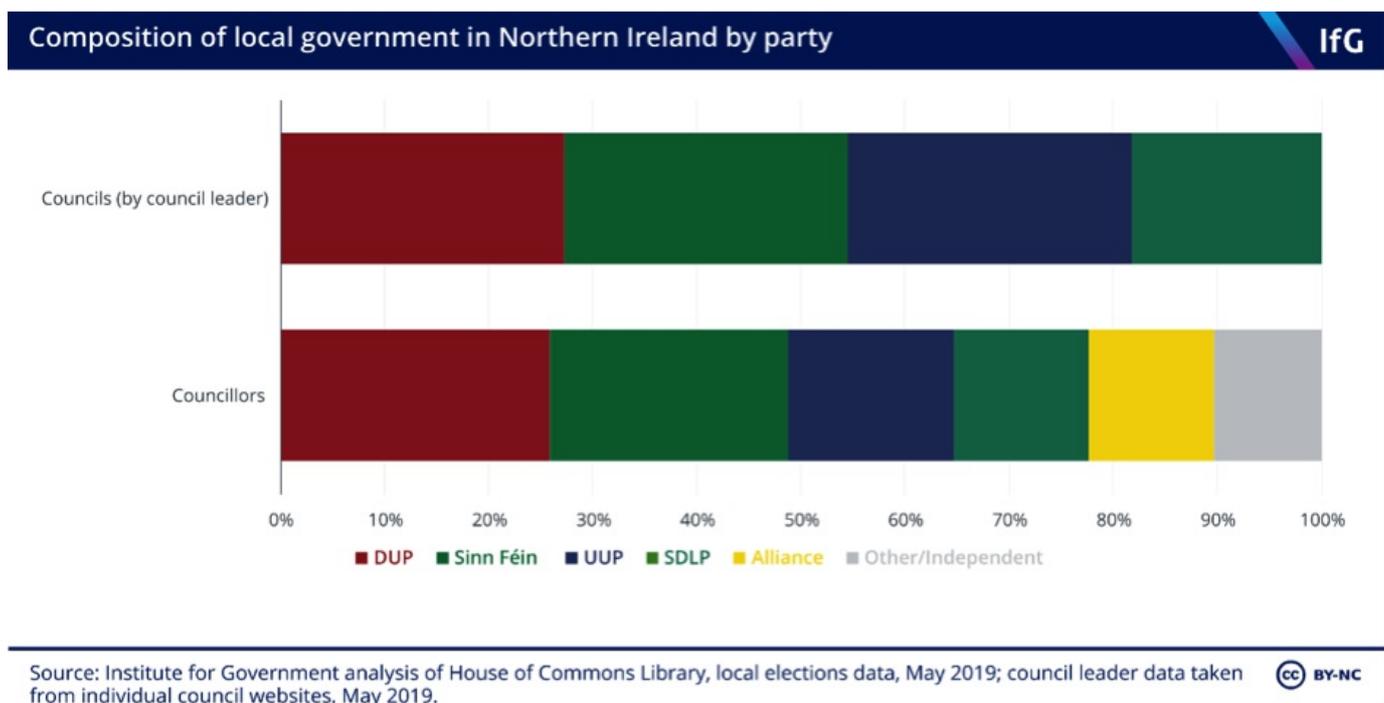
<sup>[43]</sup>

<sup>[44]</sup>

**What is the structure of local government in Northern Ireland?** <sup>[45]</sup>

There are 11 local authorities in Northern Ireland, for which responsibility is devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. As in Scotland and Wales, all of Northern Ireland’s councils are unitary authorities. Councils in Northern Ireland typically use a committee system <sup>[46]</sup> of governance and are led by a chairperson (or mayor) chosen by the council for a one-year term.

At the local elections in 2019, the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) gained the most seats [24] (26%), followed by Sinn Féin (23%), the UUP (Ulster Unionist Party - 16%), the SDLP (13%), and Alliance (12%). No party holds a majority on any council.



**Composition of local government in Northern Ireland by party (Updated: 06 Jun 2019)** [48]

[49]

[50]

**Update date:**

Friday, May 31, 2019

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