



Borderwise:

Legal System

This information sheet provides a general overview of how the legal system operates in Northern Ireland.



Introduction

Northern Ireland's legal system is similar to that of England and Wales. The UK Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs and the Lord Chancellor have responsibility for various aspects of the administration of justice in Northern Ireland including the operation of the courts, the appointment of judges and the provision of legal aid services. The Northern Ireland Court Service provides the administration for courts in Northern Ireland. For more information contact: 028 9032 8594 or visit the website www.courtsni.gov.u



Seeking Legal Help

Should your case be one which you want to take to a solicitor you can consult a list produced by the Northern Ireland Law Society in order to find details of firms. This facility allows you to search for solicitors undertaking particular types of work.



Further details are available from: The Northern Ireland Law Society Telephone: 028 9023 1614 or online at www.lawsoc-ni.org

Legal Aid

If you're having legal problems or are accused of a crime and you can't afford to pay for a legal adviser you may be able to get legal aid from the Legal Services Commission. The Legal Aid schemes are publicly funded and can assist you to obtain a solicitor's help. Access to the Legal Aid schemes is through a network of more than 1,000 solicitors in nearly 700 offices throughout Northern Ireland. It is there to ensure that no one is denied access to independent legal advice simply because they cannot afford it. In most towns there are solicitors who carry out Legal Aid work, and who will be able tell you whether your financial situation qualifies you for this help

Who is entitled to Legal Aid?

If you're getting Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or the guarantee credit part of Pension Credit, you'll automatically qualify for Legal Help. Also, you'll automatically qualify for Legal Help if you're an asylum seeker getting government asylum support. Otherwise you have to meet both income and capital conditions. Your eligibility for legal aid is means tested; your income and capital must be below certain limits. Your solicitor will be able to establish whether or not you are entitled to legal aid.

The Police

The investigation of criminal offences is carried out by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The PSNI is organised into District Command Units (DCUs) which are structured primarily on local council areas. The PSNI is responsible for traffic control. The Code of Ethics for the Police Service sets out the standards of conduct and practice that police officers must keep to – this is monitored by the Policing Board. The PSNI is subject to the freedom of information legislation and you may access certain information which is held about you.

Further information is available online at: www.psnipolice.uk

Going
North

The Police Ombudsman

The Police Ombudsman is an independent office which investigates complaints about the conduct of the police.

T: 084 5601 2931

Police Ombudsman
New Cathedral Buildings,
St Anne's Square,
11 Church Street,
Belfast BT1 1PG
Tel: 028 9082 8600

www.policeombudsman.org

Prisons

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is an agency of the Northern Ireland Office. It is responsible for running the prisons. The prisons are monitored by Independent Monitoring Boards who are appointed by the Northern Ireland Office.

The Prison Service finances the Assisted Visitors Scheme which is administered by the Social Security Agency. You may get up to 26 subsidised visits a year to a relative in prison if you are on Income Support, income based Jobseeker's Allowance, pension credit or have a low income and qualify for Working Tax Credit with a disability or child element. You may apply to your local Jobs and benefits/Social security office or by visiting the prisons service website: www.niprisonservice.gov.uk

Contact Details

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