

## Informing national policy making

# The Northern Ireland Assembly

## The Challenge

- Make meaningful information easily accessible to members of the Northern Ireland Assembly to support policy making

## The Benefits

- Ensures new policies are made based on a full understanding of the pertinent facts
- Improves insight into the actual issues faced in communities and the needs of constituents
- Makes up-to-date information about Northern Ireland easily accessible online in an interactive format

**At Parliament Buildings in Belfast, GIS is playing a key role in helping politicians in their scrutiny of government policy. The Northern Ireland Assembly is using ArcGIS Online to shed light on complicated issues and make meaningful information accessible to support politicians in their day-to-day business.**

## The Challenge

Month after month, decisions have to be made in the Northern Ireland Assembly that are of immense importance to the people of Northern Ireland. The 108 Members of this legislative body allocate funding and create new policies in fields ranging from enterprise and education to the environment and health. To fulfil their roles responsibly, they require timely access to accurate, complete and meaningful information

“Members have a lot of data to assimilate when they are considering new policies,” says Anne Campbell, a geographic information consultant employed by Land and Property Services and seconded to the Northern Ireland Assembly on a long-term basis. “There are 12 statutory Committees, each comprising 11 representatives from local political parties, so it is really important for them to be able to access and share the same information.”

For several years, geographic information system (GIS) technology from Esri Ireland has been used very successfully to conduct geospatial analysis into areas such as library provision and in the production of a range of maps for the Northern Ireland Assembly. “These static maps were incorporated into PDF reports and helped to add clarity to a number of complex issues,” says Campbell, “but I wanted to use GIS to deliver an even more valuable service for Assembly Members.”

## The Solution

As is often the case, the Northern Ireland Assembly was motivated to adopt a new approach to GIS after hearing about the achievements of another Esri customer. Campbell recalls: “A consultant from Esri Ireland showed me how the White House has been using Esri’s ArcGIS Online solution and that really inspired me. I decided to use ArcGIS Online myself to make more interactive maps available to decision-makers here in the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

The organisation started by converting existing static maps, created using ArcGIS Desktop, into interactive maps using ArcGIS Online. “Assembly Members quickly latched on to them and so I began to offer all new maps in the interactive, web-based format,” Campbell explains. “I then used the map gallery template provided with ArcGIS Online to organise all the maps into categories. This makes it easy for Committee Members to find the maps they need via a portal on the Northern Ireland Assembly’s intranet, using any desktop computer or on their tablet devices.”



Parliament Buildings in Belfast, seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly

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Anne Campbell, geographic information consultant, Northern Ireland Assembly



Interactive web maps created using ArcGIS Online

### Benefits

The new, interactive web maps that are being created using ArcGIS Online give Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly a deeper insight into complex issues. Assembly Members can, for the first time, query the map-based data and zoom in to consider the potential impact of decisions on specific council areas and constituencies.

In one recent initiative, a web map was created displaying the many different factors that multi-national businesses consider when making decisions about whether or not to relocate to Northern Ireland, such as the availability and accessibility of transportation links, broadband, universities, hospitals and business parks. This interactive map was presented to the Assembly’s Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, enabling Members to see where investment might be needed to improve infrastructure in potential new business hubs outside of Belfast. “This map gave Committee Members the information they needed in an accessible format and could help them to contribute to important decisions that could ultimately help to create new jobs and deliver a boost for the local economy,” Campbell says.

The use of ArcGIS Online is also helping to augment Members’ understanding of local issues within their individual constituency areas. Static maps in regular reports have been replaced with a fully interactive, web-based map that enables users to zoom into any of the 582 electoral wards. This online solution even provides access to street level views to outline relevant information on issues such as road accident statistics, deprivation factors, low-income families and school enrolments. “Members can therefore use the online maps to help their constituents by identifying areas that have particular needs such as road traffic calming measures where there is a high rate of road traffic collisions,” Campbell notes. “ArcGIS Online makes it easier for everyone to understand and deal with matters that can be of huge significance to constituents.”

In another project, a web map has been produced showing the distribution of different categories of support organisations working with people with learning disabilities. Unusually, this map is editable, so anyone working for the organisations, or in the general service area, can modify, add or remove information where necessary to keep the map up-to-date. “This map removed ambiguity about where services were located and if and/or where under-provision of care existed,” Campbell says. “It’s another great example of how GIS makes up-to-date information easily accessible to everyone who needs it and supports the work of politicians in Northern Ireland.”

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