

European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

[AS INTRODUCED]

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Schedule—The Charter Articles

**THE FOLLOWING ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS ARE ALSO PUBLISHED:
Explanatory Notes (SP Bill 70-EN), a Financial Memorandum (SP Bill 70-FM), a Policy
Memorandum (SP Bill 70-PM) and statements on legislative competence (SP Bill 70-LC).**

European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

[AS INTRODUCED]

An Act of the Scottish Parliament to incorporate in Scots law the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and for connected purposes.

1 The Charter Articles

- 5 (1) In this Act, “the Charter Articles” means Articles 2 to 11 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government which was opened for signature by the Council of Europe on 15 October 1985.
- (2) The Charter Articles are set out in the schedule.
- 10 (3) The Scottish Ministers may by regulations amend this Act to reflect amending or additional protocols to the Charter that have been signed by the United Kingdom (whether before or after the coming into force of this section).

2 Duty to act compatibly with the Charter Articles

- (1) In the exercise of their functions the Scottish Ministers must act compatibly with the Charter Articles.
- 15 (2) In subsection (1)—
“functions”—
(a) means functions that are within devolved competence (within the meaning of section 54 of the Scotland Act 1998),
(b) includes the making of subordinate legislation but does not include the preparation, introduction or promotion of primary legislation,
- 20 “act” includes a failure to act (including a failure to make legislation).

3 Duty to promote local self-government

- (1) The Scottish Ministers must—
(a) keep under consideration whether there are any steps which they could take which
25 would or might safeguard and reinforce local self-government and increase the autonomy of local authorities, and

(b) if they consider it appropriate to do so, take any of the steps identified by that consideration.

(2) The Scottish Ministers must, in accordance with subsection (3), lay before the Scottish Parliament and publish a report of—

(a) the steps they have taken, or plan to take, by the date the report is published to safeguard and reinforce local self-government and increase the autonomy of local authorities, and

(b) their plans until the date on which the next report is to be published to safeguard and reinforce local self-government and increase the autonomy of local authorities.

(3) The first such report is to be published no later than 5 years after subsection (1) comes into force, and each subsequent such report is to be published no later than 5 years after the publication of the previous such report.

(4) In complying with their duties under subsections (1) and (2) the Scottish Ministers must consult persons with an interest in local government in Scotland.

4 Interpretation of legislation

(1) So far as it is possible to do so, legislation (whether an Act or subordinate legislation) to the extent that its provisions are within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament must be read and given effect in a way which is compatible with the Charter Articles.

(2) This section—

(a) applies to legislation whenever enacted,

(b) does not affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of any incompatible subordinate legislation if (disregarding any possibility of revocation) primary legislation prevents removal of the incompatibility.

5 Declaration of incompatibility

(1) Subsection (2) applies in any proceedings in which a court determines whether a provision of an Act is compatible with the Charter Articles.

(2) If the court is satisfied that the provision is incompatible with the Charter Articles, it may make a declaration of that incompatibility.

(3) Subsection (4) applies in any proceedings in which a court determines whether a provision of subordinate legislation is incompatible with the Charter Articles.

(4) If the court is satisfied—

(a) that the provision is incompatible with the Charter Articles, and

(b) that (disregarding any possibility of revocation) primary legislation prevents removal of the incompatibility,

it may make a declaration of that incompatibility.

(5) In this section “court” means—

(a) the Supreme Court, or

(b) the Court of Session.

- (6) A declaration under this section (“a declaration of incompatibility”) does not affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of the provision in respect of which it is given.
- (7) A declaration of incompatibility may be made only in respect of a provision (whether of an Act or of subordinate legislation) if the provision is within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament.

6 Power to take remedial action

- (1) The Scottish Ministers may by regulations make such provision as they consider necessary or expedient in consequence of a declaration of incompatibility.
- (2) Regulations made under subsection (1) may modify any enactment other than this Act.

7 Power to remove or limit retrospective effect of decisions etc.

- (1) This section applies—
- (a) where a court decides that the Scottish Ministers have breached a duty imposed on them by this Act, or
 - (b) where—
 - (i) a court decides that subordinate legislation made prior to the coming into force of this Act is incompatible with the Charter Articles, and
 - (ii) it would not be possible for the court to make a declaration of incompatibility under section 5(4).
- (2) The court may make an order—
- (a) removing or limiting any retrospective effect of the decision, or
 - (b) suspending the effect of the decision for any period and on any conditions to allow the breach or incompatibility to be addressed.
- (3) In deciding whether to make an order under this section, the court shall (among other things) have regard to the extent to which persons who are not parties to the proceedings would otherwise be adversely affected.

8 Statements about Charter-compatibility of Bills

- (1) A member of the Scottish Parliament introducing a Public Bill in the Parliament must, on or before introduction, make a statement about the extent to which, in that member’s view, the Bill is compatible with the Charter Articles.
- (2) The Parliament must publish any statement made under subsection (1).

9 Regulation-making powers

- (1) Regulations under this Act may make different provision for different purposes.
- (2) Regulations under this Act are subject to the affirmative procedure.

10 Commencement

- (1) This section and section 11 come into force on the day after Royal Assent.
- (2) The other provisions of this Act come into force at the end of the period of 6 months beginning with the day of Royal Assent.

11 Short title

The short title of this Act is the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2020.

SCHEDULE
(introduced by section 1(2))

THE CHARTER ARTICLES

Article 2 – Constitutional and legal foundation for local self-government

5 The principle of local self-government shall be recognised in domestic legislation, and where practicable in the constitution.

Article 3 – Concept of local self-government

1 Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.

10

2 This right shall be exercised by councils or assemblies composed of members freely elected by secret ballot on the basis of direct, equal, universal suffrage, and which may possess executive organs responsible to them. This provision shall in no way affect recourse to assemblies of citizens, referendums or any other form of direct citizen participation where it is permitted by statute.

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Article 4 – Scope of local self-government

1 The basic powers and responsibilities of local authorities shall be prescribed by the constitution or by statute. However, this provision shall not prevent the attribution to local authorities of powers and responsibilities for specific purposes in accordance with the law.

20

2 Local authorities shall, within the limits of the law, have full discretion to exercise their initiative with regard to any matter which is not excluded from their competence nor assigned to any other authority.

3 Public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen. Allocation of responsibility to another authority should weigh up the extent and nature of the task and requirements of efficiency and economy.

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4 Powers given to local authorities shall normally be full and exclusive. They may not be undermined or limited by another, central or regional, authority except as provided for by the law.

30

5 Where powers are delegated to them by a central or regional authority, local authorities shall, insofar as possible, be allowed discretion in adapting their exercise to local conditions.

6 Local authorities shall be consulted, insofar as possible, in due time and in an appropriate way in the planning and decision-making processes for all matters which concern them directly.

35

Article 5 – Protection of local authority boundaries

Changes in local authority boundaries shall not be made without prior consultation of the local communities concerned, possibly by means of a referendum where this is permitted by statute.

Article 6 – Appropriate administrative structures and resources for the tasks of local authorities

1 Without prejudice to more general statutory provisions, local authorities shall be able
to determine their own internal administrative structures in order to adapt them to local
needs and ensure effective management.

5 2 The conditions of service of local government employees shall be such as to permit the
recruitment of high-quality staff on the basis of merit and competence; to this end
adequate training opportunities, remuneration and career prospects shall be provided.

Article 7 – Conditions under which responsibilities at local level are exercised

10 1 The conditions of office of local elected representatives shall provide for free exercise
of their functions.

2 They shall allow for appropriate financial compensation for expenses incurred in the
exercise of the office in question as well as, where appropriate, compensation for loss
of earnings or remuneration for work done and corresponding social welfare protection.

15 3 Any functions and activities which are deemed incompatible with the holding of local
elective office shall be determined by statute or fundamental legal principles.

Article 8 – Administrative supervision of local authorities' activities

1 Any administrative supervision of local authorities may only be exercised according to
such procedures and in such cases as are provided for by the constitution or by statute.

20 2 Any administrative supervision of the activities of the local authorities shall normally
aim only at ensuring compliance with the law and with constitutional principles.
Administrative supervision may however be exercised with regard to expediency by
higher-level authorities in respect of tasks the execution of which is delegated to local
authorities.

25 3 Administrative supervision of local authorities shall be exercised in such a way as to
ensure that the intervention of the controlling authority is kept in proportion to the
importance of the interests which it is intended to protect.

Article 9 – Financial resources of local authorities

30 1 Local authorities shall be entitled, within national economic policy, to adequate financial
resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their
powers.

2 Local authorities' financial resources shall be commensurate with the responsibilities
provided for by the constitution and the law.

35 3 Part at least of the financial resources of local authorities shall derive from local taxes
and charges of which, within the limits of statute, they have the power to determine the
rate.

4 The financial systems on which resources available to local authorities are based shall
be of a sufficiently diversified and buoyant nature to enable them to keep pace as far
as practically possible with the real evolution of the cost of carrying out their tasks.

40 5 The protection of financially weaker local authorities calls for the institution of financial
equalisation procedures or equivalent measures which are designed to correct the effects
of the unequal distribution of potential sources of finance and of the financial burden

they must support. Such procedures or measures shall not diminish the discretion local authorities may exercise within their own sphere of responsibility.

6 Local authorities shall be consulted, in an appropriate manner, on the way in which redistributed resources are to be allocated to them.

5 7 As far as possible, grants to local authorities shall not be earmarked for the financing of specific projects. The provision of grants shall not remove the basic freedom of local authorities to exercise policy discretion within their own jurisdiction.

8 For the purpose of borrowing for capital investment, local authorities shall have access to the national capital market within the limits of the law.

10 *Article 10 – Local authorities' right to associate*

1 Local authorities shall be entitled, in exercising their powers, to co-operate and, within the framework of the law, to form consortia with other local authorities in order to carry out tasks of common interest.

15 2 The entitlement of local authorities to belong to an association for the protection and promotion of their common interests and to belong to an international association of local authorities shall be recognised in each State.

3 Local authorities shall be entitled, under such conditions as may be provided for by the law, to co-operate with their counterparts in other States.

Article 11 – Legal protection of local self-government

20 Local authorities shall have the right of recourse to a judicial remedy in order to secure free exercise of their powers and respect for such principles of local self-government as are enshrined in the constitution or domestic legislation.

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An Act of the Scottish Parliament to incorporate in Scots law the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and for connected purposes.

Introduced by: Andy Wightman
On: 5 May 2020
Bill type: Member's Bill

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