

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

6th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 3
November 2021

PE1896: Provide every primary school child in
Scotland with a reusable water bottle

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner	Callum Isted
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to replace the disposable water bottle provided with primary school lunches with a sustainable, reusable, metal bottle.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1896

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that has been under consideration since 20 September 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 146 signatures have been received.
4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.
5. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe C**.

Petitioner submission

6. The petitioner is aged 7 years old. He says that each week schoolchildren are given 250ml disposable plastic water bottles to have with their lunches. He feels very strongly that this is the wrong thing to do. He says that 'you want to help the environment but we're wasting more plastic than the weight of one of the pandas at the zoo (estimated per school, per year)'.
7. Callum has been campaigning to have reusable water bottles since early this year and is determined his campaign will succeed. He has solved the problem for his school and now wants to help the whole of Scotland.
8. He doesn't understand why the Scottish Government can't provide funding to Councils to provide reusable water bottles.
9. He also points out that some schools do not have working facilities such as drinking taps. He and his eco group at school have asked for the broken taps in his school to be repaired.
10. Callum also mentions COP26 and the fact that some children in Scotland can't access safe drinking water without damaging the oceans with single use plastic. He states that "this is embarrassing, and you should fix it".

Scottish Government submission

11. The Scottish Government submission details the requirement that free drinking water must be readily available for all children and young people throughout the school day, as per the provisions of The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020.
12. However, the nutritional standards and the associated statutory guidance does not specify the way in which water should be provided and the Scottish Government states that this is a matter for individual education authorities to determine.
13. In its submission, the Scottish Government notes its plans to introduce legislation later this year to ban some of the most problematic single use plastic products (expanded polystyrene beverage cups, expanded polystyrene food containers, single-use plastic beverage stirrers, plastic cutlery, straws, balloon sticks and plastic plates).

14. However, the Scottish Government's view is that it is ultimately for education authorities to consider whether provision of water bottles is something that they wish to consider.

15. The Covid-19 pandemic was cited as one reason why education authorities and schools may not wish to progress with providing reusable water bottles, given concerns about communal water facilities. However, they would not rule out future consideration when circumstances change.

Action

16. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

PE1896: PROVIDE EVERY PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD IN SCOTLAND WITH A REUSABLE WATER BOTTLE

Petitioner

Callum Isted

Date Lodged

20 September 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to replace the disposable water bottle provided with primary school lunches with a sustainable, reusable, metal bottle.

Previous action

Callum has:

- written to his headteacher, who forwarded his complaint to West Lothian Council who then made the disposable water bottle in school lunches optional
- contacted & received positive responses from several MSPs
- raised over £1,400 to buy reusable water bottles for his school, with additional lids to make his scheme sustainable for the future.
- will have finished walking the entire John Muir Way (134 miles) in order to raise the money above

Background information

Each week schoolchildren are given 250ml disposable plastic water bottles to have with their lunches. Callum (age 7) feels very strongly that this is the wrong thing to do.

Callum has been running his campaign since early 2021 and is very determined to succeed.

He says that you want to help the environment but were wasting more plastic than the weight of one of the pandas at the zoo (estimated per school, per year). He has solved the problem for his school and now wants to help the whole of Scotland.

Many adults have agreed with him and Sue Webber MSP has been particularly helpful.

He says adults should listen to children about the environment and provide the money to buy more water bottles. Shortly, he will have walked 134 miles to prove his point.

He has already achieved a phenomenal amount for a 7 year old and I hope his petition is viewed positively.

SPICe

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1896: Provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle, lodged by Callum Isted

Background

Primary schools

Local authorities are responsible for almost all publicly funded primary schools in Scotland. A small number are grant-aided through direct Scottish Government funding – although most of these would be classed as special schools which cater for specific additional support needs.

In 2020, there were 2,005 mainstream publicly funded primary schools in Scotland and 394,000 pupils. Local authorities are responsible for delivering school meals in their schools. However, in practice this service may be delivered through a contractor.

Impacts of bottled water

[GreenAlliance have estimated that](#) tap water causes 180 times fewer Greenhouse Gas emissions than a standard single use plastic bottle of water, and that a typical refillable container only has to be topped up 15 times to have a lower carbon impact than a single-use plastic one ([see here for methodology](#)). It should be noted however, that environmental impacts of substituting single-use plastic with reusable items depend on the materials used in the reusable alternative, and on how (and after how many uses) that alternative is disposed of. Generally, however, substitution of a single-use plastic water bottle with a reusable bottle can be expected to have a significantly positive environmental impact. Tap water is also significantly cheaper than bottled water.

Throw away culture and the transition to a circular economy

The petitioner's concern is that the local authority has provided lunches which included 250ml disposable plastic water bottles. He is advocating that pupils are given metal refillable bottles instead.

The Scottish Government published '[The Environment Strategy for Scotland: Vision and Outcomes](#)' in 2020 with a view to providing an overarching framework for achieving environmental goals and tackling climate change. The Strategy identified a number of outcomes, including that “we use and re-use resources wisely and have ended the throw-away culture”.

The [Scottish Government's 2020 Climate Change Plan update](#) (CCPu) went on to make a number of policy commitments on waste and sets out a vision that by 2045, Scotland will have moved from a ‘take, make and dispose’ linear economy to a circular economy (with significant progress made by 2032).

The [Scottish Government has published draft secondary legislation to ban a number of problematic single-use plastic items](#) identified in the [EU's Single Use Plastics \(SUP\) Directive](#) from 2022 – however this does not include water bottles unless they are made of oxo-degradable plastic (most plastic water bottles are PET plastic). However, in the CCPu the Scottish Government commits to “considering how we will give effect to the wider requirements of the Directive”. The [Scottish Government has committed to meet or exceed the standards set out in the European Union's SUP Directive](#). Specific targets in the Directive include:

- a 77% separate collection target for plastic bottles by 2025 – increasing to 90% by 2029
- incorporating 25% of recycled plastic in PET beverage bottles from 2025, and 30% in all plastic beverage bottles from 2030

The Directive states:

“Beverage bottles that are single-use plastic products are one of the marine litter items that are found the most on beaches in the Union. This is due to ineffective separate collection systems and low participation in those systems by consumers.”

One of the Scottish Government's key policies to seek to increase recycling rates is the [forthcoming introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme](#) (scheduled to commence in July 2022 although this is currently subject to a review in light of the pandemic), under which single-use PET plastic water bottles within a certain size range will be subject to a minimum charge, returnable when the item is returned to a recycling point. It should be noted, however, that initiatives to reduce waste at source and promote sit further up the 'waste hierarchy' in terms of how waste interventions should be prioritised by policy makers. The [waste hierarchy is set out in law in the Environmental Protection Act 1990](#).



Source: [Scottish Government](#)

The circular economy and procurement

The CCPu identifies public procurement as a key sector where circular economy principles must be embedded, in order to reduce emissions and to “accelerate reduction and recycling of waste”.

[Zero Waste Scotland has published advice](#) for food producers and hospitality businesses on how to move away from single use items. This includes a 'hierarchy' of actions. These are:

1. Rethink your operations to remove the need for single-use items in the first place
2. Rethink your set up to reduce demand for single-use items
3. Only where you cannot avoid single-use items, choose materials that have the lowest environmental impact

4. Make sure all single-use items are actually recycled or composted.

Under the first action, the first example of how to achieve this is, “switch to reusable drinks cups, crockery and cutlery for consuming food on the premises”.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, Michael Matheson MSP, [discussed the issue of sustainability and climate change engagement with young people and in schools with the NZET Committee on 14 September 2021 and said:](#)

“It is important that we recycle stuff, but we also need to reduce our use and the amount of waste that we create, which is part of the challenge that we face. We need to make sure that schools play their part in considering how we can reduce the amount of waste that builds up in schools through lunch packs and everything else. That will play an important part, and we are taking forward measures to support that type of behaviour change.”

Ned Sharratt & Alexa Morrison
Senior Researchers

10/09/2021

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 21 September 2021

PE1896/A – Provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle

I am responding to the Committee on behalf of the Scottish Government in relation to Petition PE1896 lodged by Callum Isted, which calls for reusable water bottles to be provided to all primary school children replacing the disposable water bottle provided with primary school lunches with a sustainable, reusable, metal bottle.

Firstly, I would like to pass on my congratulations to Callum on the work he has done so far in both walking the entire 134 miles of John Muir Way, and raising £1,400 to buy reusable water bottles for his school. I am very pleased to see the extraordinary commitment he has shown to demonstrate his support for the plan and his awareness of the benefits of reusing water bottles.

With regards to the provision of drinking water in schools, under the provisions of The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020 free drinking water must be readily available for all children and young people throughout the school day. I recognise it is most likely that children and young people in attendance will store their drinking water in bottles, even where the water comes from the mains supply. The nutritional standards and the associated statutory guidance do not specify the way in which water should be provided.

Therefore it can be provided in a range of ways, for example, via water fountains, in jugs, or in bottled form. That is a matter for individual education authorities to determine in light of their local circumstances, it would not be appropriate to assume that because the provision of bottled water is the practice in one school, that the same practice will be in place across the whole authority or country.

It should, however, be acknowledged that we are currently not operating in usual times, and that there remain in place mitigations in schools to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. Education authorities and

schools have been asked to undertake risk assessments and it may be that the use of bottled water is an appropriate measure in some schools, as a result of their risk assessments and circumstances, and also continuing to meet their statutory requirements.

The Scottish Government is committed to taking action on single-use plastic products, that is why we have notified the World Trade Organisation of our plans to ban some of the most problematic single use plastic products (expanded polystyrene beverage cups, expanded polystyrene food containers, single-use plastic beverage stirrers, plastic cutlery, straws, balloon sticks and plastic plates). We will be introducing legislation on this matter to the Scottish Parliament later this year. The Scottish Government is also committed to take further steps to consult on a charge on single-use disposable beverage cups.

It is therefore ultimately for education authorities to consider whether the provision of water bottles is something that they wish to consider. The provision of single-use bottled water is not a requirement of law or guidance, and so education authorities have the freedom to make these decisions based on local circumstance and need. There may be particular reasons why, at this time, education authorities and schools would not wish to progress this approach, particularly if there are concerns about communal use of drinking fountains or jugs as a result of their assessment of risk, but that would not rule out future consideration when circumstances change.

Petitioner submission of 25 October 2021

PE1896/B - Provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle

Thank you to Shirley-Anne Somerville for writing back to me. Thank you to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee for discussing my petition. I hope I will be able to watch it next week.

You say that the councils have to decide if we should have reusable water bottles like Klean Kanteens. But the council gets some money from the Government and I don't understand why you can't give the councils the money to spend on water bottles.

Since you replied, I have found out that the problem is bigger than water bottles. Some schools don't even have drinking taps that work. I am a member of the school's eco group and we have asked the janitor to repair our broken taps. But some of my friends don't have taps that work for drinking at their schools. This is wrong. We should be able to drink as much water as we need to during the day without damaging the oceans.

You are inviting lots of people to Scotland to talk about climate change next week. It is on the news a lot. But some children in Scotland can't access safe drinking water without damaging the oceans with single use plastic. This is embarrassing and you should fix it.

I am also angry that you are still using plastic spoons.

Thank you for listening.