

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
22 February 2023

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

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. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [23 November 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to formally write to the First Minister. It also agreed to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport to give evidence to the Committee.
2. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, Lorna Slater MSP.
3. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
4. The Committee has received new responses from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C**.
5. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
6. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

7. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

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

Petitioner

Callum Isted

Date Lodged

20/09/2021

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.

Annexe B

Extract from the Official Report of last consideration of PE1896 on 23rd November 2022

The Convener: PE1896, which has been lodged by Callum Isted, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to replace the disposable water bottle that is provided with primary school lunches with a sustainable reusable metal bottle.

During our previous consideration of the petition, we were fortunate to hear from Callum personally—as members will recall, he was the youngest ever petitioner to present to the Scottish Parliament. We have to thank him not just for his evidence but for the fact that his petition was specifically cited in relation to the powering change award that the committee, as a mover and shaker of the year, subsequently received from Holyrood magazine.

Callum explained why reusable water bottles are important and told us about his campaign work, which included an impressive fundraising exercise. The committee agreed to write to the First Minister, whom Callum met, to ask what action she intends to take in order to fulfil the ask of the petition.

I regret to say that we have not received a response to our representations from the First Minister on the petition, and I understand that Callum is waiting for an update from the First Minister, too. I thank Callum again for his evidence and the time that he has taken over his petition. Do members have any comments or suggestions as to how we might proceed?

Alexander Stewart: I am disappointed that neither Callum nor the committee has received any further information. There was a huge amount of publicity around Callum's coming to the committee to give evidence that day, and I would have hoped for such a young inspiring individual to be treated slightly better than that. However, we are where we are.

It is now time to write back to the First Minister to seek an update on where we are with the petition. When we had Callum here to receive the petition, there was a real buzz about the possibility of his ask becoming a reality, because he had put so much effort into it. It is disappointing that that effort has not been given the full credit that it deserves.

We need to write back to the First Minister and invite the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport to give evidence on where the petition might be going, in order to fulfil the aims that Callum put forward. His objectives and ambition were fantastic, and we should encourage them as much as we can to ensure that his dream becomes a reality.

The Convener: Are we content to proceed on that basis? I should note in passing the further representation that we have received from Sue Webber in relation to the petition. We will write to the First Minister to seek an update and to express our disappointment that neither Callum nor the committee has received any response, particularly given the personal engagement that the First Minister had with Callum on the occasion of his giving evidence to the committee.

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 21 December 2022

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

I am writing to provide you with an update to Petition PE 1896, lodged by Callum Isted, about providing reusable water bottles in primary schools.

The First Minister met Callum earlier this year to hear about his petition and how he had walked the John Muir Way in order to raise money to buy reusable water bottles for his school. I commend him for such an admirable achievement and feel that this petition has further enhanced his achievement by helping to raise public awareness about how important it is to take steps to care for the environment more generally.

As you will be aware, there is a statutory requirement that all schools must make sure that drinking water is available free of charge for all pupils at all times of the day, including at meal times. It is up to each school and local authority to decide how drinking water is provided. We believe that schools are best placed to decide what works best for their pupils.

It is also important to note that the Learning for Sustainability cross-curricular theme encourages schools to take a whole setting approach to sustainability. This means that all school buildings, grounds and policies within the school should support Learning for Sustainability, including making sure the school is taking steps to be more sustainable, which includes reducing the use of plastic.

I understand that local authorities have already taken a number of positive steps to improve sustainability in relation to the provision of food and drink in schools, including ensuring that water jugs and reusable cups are available in dining halls; using packaging which is made from fully compostable materials such as corn starch; and encouraging pupils to bring their own reusable water bottles to school. I have separately written to Directors of Education in local authorities to thank them for their continued work on this matter, and to make them aware of Callum's petition for their consideration when they make decisions about how they

wish to provide drinking water to pupils within their schools in a sustainable manner.

In addition, the First Minister has also written directly to Callum to offer the opportunity to meet with him again if he wishes to discuss his petition further with her.

I enclose a copy of both my letter to the Directors of Education at local authorities, and of the First Minister's letter to Callum Isted for your reference.

Dear Directors of Education,

I am writing to you to make you aware of a petition which has been lodged with the Scottish Parliament by a young pupil at Dextridge Primary School in West Lothian, which calls for disposable water bottles to be replaced with reusable metal bottles: [PE1896 Provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle | Scottish Parliament Website](#).

Callum Isted, the pupil behind this petition, has met with the First Minister to tell her about how he walked the John Muir Way in order to raise money to buy reusable water bottles for his school. I commend him for such an admirable achievement. I want to share Callum's efforts with you.

I know that you will be familiar with legislation requiring that drinking water be made available within schools at all times of the day, including during meal times. Whilst the law requires that drinking water be made available within schools, I recognise there is no legislation or guidance relating to the manner in how drinking water should be provided. The Scottish Government believes that schools are best placed to decide how to provide drinking water to their pupils at the local level. However, I do hope that you can consider Callum's petition, and wider campaigning efforts, to ensure that drinking water can be provided to Scotland's pupils in a sustainable way that is aligned with our shared ambition to tackle – and raise awareness of – the climate emergency that faces the planet.

It is also important to note that the Learning for Sustainability cross-curricular theme encourages schools to take a whole setting approach to sustainability. This means that all school buildings, grounds and policies within the school should support Learning for Sustainability, including

making sure the school is taking steps to be more sustainable, which includes reducing the use of plastic.

I am pleased to note that local authorities are already taking a number of positive steps to improve sustainability in relation to the provision of food and drink in schools, including ensuring that water jugs and reusable cups are available in dining halls; using packaging which is made from fully compostable materials such as corn starch; and encouraging pupils to bring their own reusable water bottles to school.

I would like to thank you for your continued work to ensure that sustainable approaches are taken wherever possible when providing food and drink within schools, helping to reduce both our carbon footprint and impact on the environment.

Yours sincerely,

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Dear Callum

I am writing to update you about your petition to the Scottish Parliament regarding reusable water bottles. It was an absolute pleasure to meet you earlier this year, following the initial consideration of your petition by Parliament. I am very sorry for the delay in writing back to you about this.

I have asked my officials for some advice about your petition and have considered it carefully.

The law says that all schools must make sure that drinking water is available free of charge for all pupils at all times of the day, including at meal times. It is up to each school and local authority to decide how drinking water is provided. This is because we believe that schools are best placed to decide what works best for their pupils. Schools encourage children and young people to bring refillable water bottles, or provide bottles or cups which are either reusable or made of sustainable alternatives to plastic.

My colleague Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and I have been particularly impressed by the dedication you have shown towards the aims of your petition, including raising money to buy reusable water bottles for your own school. With this in mind, she has written a letter to the Directors of Education at all local authorities drawing their attention to your petition and encouraging them to use more environmentally-friendly approaches to providing drinking water in their schools. This could include the provision of reusable bottles.

I know that your petition is still open and being considered by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee at the Scottish Parliament. If you would like to meet me again to discuss further I would be happy for you to email me at firstminister@gov.scot and my office will arrange a suitable date.

In the meantime, the Cabinet Secretary for Educations and Skills has written to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to let them know that she has written to the Directors of Education at local authorities about your petition, and that I have written this letter to you.

I am attaching copies of the Cabinet Secretary for Educations and Skills' letters to Directors of Education, and to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee at the Scottish Parliament, for your reference, and I would like to wish you and your classmates every success in the future.

NICOLA STURGEON
First Minister of Scotland

Petitioner submission of 17 January 2023

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

I hope you had a good Christmas and New Year.

Thank you for your ongoing support. I received a letter from the First Minister just before Christmas about my Petition.

I started a petition because I wanted to change the way things are done, like people were asking for at COP 26 & 27. I think the law regarding access to water should be changed. When my sister was born in 2020 we were sent a babybox with lots of useful things. I think the Government could do the same for children starting Primary 1 each year and give them a metal water bottle.

As the Government doesn't have much money at the moment I think this would be a good starting point as the Primary 1 children will be able to keep the metal water bottles and use them each year.

The First Minister has invited me to Bute House to discuss my Petition further and I will do this as soon as I can.

I look forward to hearing from you with an update on my Petition and hopefully you can get Government to agree to provide the bottles.