

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 24
January 2024

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 [19 April 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, and to the First Minister.
2. 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**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, the Petitioner and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills which are set out at **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 182 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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 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.

[Written by Callum and a parent]

Annexe B

Extract from the Official Report of last consideration of PE1896 on 19 April 2023

The Convener: We now return to Callum Isted's petition, PE1896, on providing every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle.

We last considered the petition on 22 February, when we heard evidence from the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, Lorna Slater, and the head of the Scottish Government's support and wellbeing unit, Laura Meikle. Members will recall that, at that evidence session, the minister reiterated the Scottish Government's view that it is up to local authorities to decide their budgets and how drinking water is provided, although they are required to ensure that drinking water is made available free of charge and provided in a sustainable way.

We also heard that on-going monitoring of the duties under the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 takes place through nutrition inspections and engagement with catering services and education authorities. However, members raised questions about the availability of detailed evidence from each local authority.

As members might recall, there was an outstanding commitment from the former First Minister to invite young Callum to Bute House, but I am afraid that that commitment cannot be fulfilled, because the building is now covered in building tape and closed for renovations that might take some considerable time to complete. Notwithstanding that unfulfilled promise, do colleagues have any suggestions?

Fergus Ewing: We should encourage the current First Minister to meet Callum Isted—although perhaps not in Bute house, given what you have said, convener. I am sure that the First Minister would like to do that.

We should also seek from the minister an assurance that she will request information from each local authority on water provision in schools. Specifically, we should seek some detail on the methods of provision and how sustainability requirements are met.

In addition, it occurred to me that it would be remiss of us if, in our letter to the minister, we did not specifically invite her to refer to and describe her response to Callum's petition and if we did not ask local authorities, first, whether they would wish to be part of a national procurement scheme that could implement the petition and, secondly, whether that would be more efficacious in providing a reliable and continuously available supply of water to children. The minister said that the provision of water is up to schools, and they do that in different ways—for example, through water fountains. Often, however, such things do not work or are not available when somebody wants a drink of water.

Everybody knows that it is handy to have a bottle of water. You can take it everywhere with you and keep hydrated all the time. Hydration is important for children, but most of them do not really realise that. That might be a patronising remark, but there is a risk that they do not appreciate how important it is to be hydrated in order to be alert and able to concentrate.

There is a big difference between a water fountain that might be available for several hundred kids—

The Convener: And which can be closed in a national pandemic, aside from anything else.

Fergus Ewing: Indeed.

We should encourage the minister to set out in a letter Callum Isted’s proposal as a potential option. The question is whether local authorities would like that to be done and whether they would like the Scottish Government to take on the responsibility of looking into procurement. As I pointed out to the minister, somewhat in vain, if a national procurement scheme is better able to get the best price possible in such an exercise and can do so in a way that improves provision, we owe it to Callum—as does the minister—to ensure that that is done.

The Convener: Did you want to come in, Carol?

Carol Mochan: No, I was just going to agree.

The Convener: I fully agree with Fergus Ewing. The petition is, at heart, about the introduction of reusable metal bottles through some method. I would have thought that the minister would be keen on that, as it would alleviate the pressures of implementing of her deposit return scheme if young people were not contributing to the situation and were able to adopt reusable facilities as an alternative.

Fergus Ewing: I would always encourage the minister to be as green as possible, convener.

The Convener: The clerks have absorbed the suggestions that have been made in the discussion. We look forward to hearing from the minister and, indeed, from the First Minister, who would benefit from the commitment to, enthusiasm for and sustainability in his cause that young Callum Isted has managed to offer.

Annexe C

Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity submission of 22 May 2023

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

Thank you for your letter of 21 April relating to petition PE1896: Provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle, and my attendance at a Committee evidence session on 22 February 2023.

Your letter requested that I write to all of Scotland's local authorities, referring specifically to petition PE1896, seeking the following information:

- The methods of water provision in each local authority-run school (i.e. is water provided to children through single-use bottles, water fountains etc.)
- How the authority is meeting the sustainability requirements under the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007.
- whether the authority would be interested in participating in a national procurement exercise for reusable metal water bottles, in order to benefit from economies of scale and to meet the aim of Callum's petition.

Although I attended the evidence session due to the subject matter falling within my Ministerial portfolio, these questions raised fall within the remit of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and a response to your requests will therefore be provided by the Cabinet Secretary.

I would of course be happy to respond to any other relevant queries the Committee might have and I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm my support for the principle of reducing single-use plastics use in schools.

Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity

Petitioner submission of 27 June 2023

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

Thank you for letting me know about Lorna Slater's reply to your letter. I am writing this letter as a response to Lorna Slater's letter.

On 22 February, the Citizen Participation and Petitions Committee asked questions to Lorna Slater and she didn't have answers with her.

On 19 April, the Committee wrote the questions in a letter because they hadn't heard an answer to their questions.

On 22 May, Lorna Slater wrote back to the Committee to say they weren't her questions to answer.

On 1 July – 1 September, it is the Parliament's summer holidays, nothing will be discussed.

Lorna Slater is one of the leaders of the Scottish Green Party.

The Scottish Green Party wants to help the environment and are in Government.

My petition has been delayed by 7 months (February ----- September)¹ by one of the leaders of the Scottish Green Party and my petition is to help the environment.

Can the Committee please ask an adult to move my petition forward?

I hope you all have a great summer!

I am fundraising for eight environmental charities this year.

¹ I have used extra hyphens here to show the length of time

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 31 August 2023

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

I am writing to you in response to your letter dated 21 April 2023 to the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity regarding the above petition. I am also aware that Ms Slater wrote to you on 22 May 2023, confirming that I would provide the Committee with a response to your letter as the policy on the provision of food and drink in schools sits within my ministerial portfolio.

I note the contents of your letter which states that, at your committee's meeting on 19 April 2023, you noted education authorities are required to provide free drinking water during the school day and they must also have due regard to guidance provided by Scottish ministers in relation to the provision for sustainability under the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. However, you also raised the concerns of committee members about a lack of information on how schools fulfil their obligations in practice.

With this in mind, your letter asked if the Scottish Government would be willing to write to all local authorities seeking information about the methods they use to make drinking water available within their schools; how they meet sustainability requirements under the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007; and whether any local authority might be interested in participating in a national procurement exercise for reusable metal water bottles.

On the Committee's behalf, the Scottish Government wrote to all 32 Local Authorities and we have received returns from 26 local authorities. My officials have summarised the findings from this exercise within the tables contained in the annex to this letter. However, if the Committee would like to have sight of the original returns, please write to Douglas Forrester at douglas.forrester@gov.scot.

In the spirit of the New Deal for Local Government, which recognises that education is managed and delivered locally, I have copied this correspondence to Cllr Tony Buchanan, COSLA's spokesperson for children and young people.

I hope this information is helpful.

Jenny Gilruth MSP

SUMMARY OF PROVISION OF WATER IN LOCAL AUTHORITY RUN SCHOOLS

Question 1: How do local authority run schools make drinking water available to pupils within their schools?

The table below summarises all methods of water provision which were reported by local authorities in the schools across their respective areas. The automatic provision of reusable water bottles to pupils, or the use of single-use bottles, is not authority-wide policy in any local authority area. Single-use bottles were used only in some schools or under specific circumstances.

Local Authority	Water fountains or dispensers	Water bottles (provided)	Water bottles (pupils' own)	Reusable cups	Reusable cups with eco-friendly material	Single-use bottles
Aberdeen City	X		X	X		X
Aberdeenshire	X		X		X	
Angus	X	X	X	X		X
Argyll & Bute	X	X	X	X	X	X
Clackmannanshire	X	X	X	X	X	X
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	X	X	X	X	X	X

Dumfries and Galloway	X		X	X		
Dundee City	X	X	X	X	X	X
East Ayrshire			X	X		
East Dunbartonshire	X		X	X		
East Lothian	X		X	X		
East Renfrewshire	X		X	X	X	X
Falkirk	X		X	X		
Fife	X	X	X	X		X
Glasgow City	X	X	X			X
Inverclyde	X		X	X	X	
Midlothian	X		X	X		X
Moray	X		X	X		
Perth and Kinross	X		X	X		X
Renfrewshire	X		X	X		X
Shetland Islands	X		X	X		X
South Ayrshire	X	X	X	X		
South Lanarkshire	X		X	X		
Stirling	X	X	X	X	X	X

West Dunbartonshire	X	X	X		X	X
West Lothian	X		X	X		

Question 2: How is your local authority meeting the sustainability requirements under the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007'?

Local Authority	Summary of actions taken locally
Aberdeen City	<p>There is access to water at all times through fountains (or dispensers where these are not available) with refillable cups available. Aberdeen City Council are also considering outdoor fountains.</p> <p>Bottled water is available for purchase in school canteens, although pupils are encouraged to bring their own.</p>
Aberdeenshire	<p>Bottled drinks sold in schools are in recycled plastic bottles (and are 100% recyclable). Concerns by Aberdeenshire Council over the loss of bottles if they were issued, so focus is on recycling rather than removing bottles.</p>
Angus	<p>Water fountains are available, where pupils can top up. Primary school lunches have reusable jugs and cups. Secondary lunches have single-use bottles, this is to allow pupils to use the 'grab and go' service.</p> <p>Angus Council consulted with secondary pupils and this was their preferred option, so they felt removing it risked adversely impacting school meal uptake rates.</p>

<p>Argyll & Bute</p>	<p>Catering services at Argyll & Bute Council work closely with schools and suppliers to ensure they are providing a sustainable service, this includes the provision of water during lunchtime service.</p>
<p>Clackmannanshire</p>	<p>Each school in Clackmannanshire has a bespoke approach within their setting, however schools in Clackmannanshire strive to avoid using single use plastics as cutlery.</p>
<p>Comhairle nan Eilean Siar</p>	<p>This matter seems to be decided locally by schools. Returns indicate some schools encourage pupils bringing their own bottles, although some schools bought reusable bottles through parent councils.</p> <p>Water fountains are available in most schools with reusable cups, some schools reported using cups made from eco-friendly materials.</p>
<p>Dumfries and Galloway</p>	<p>The primary school meals service in Dumfries and Galloway is committed to delivering a plastic free lunch time provision in all primary and nursery settings. Pupils can receive water in reusable polycarbonate cups and jugs and are also encouraged to bring their own water bottles to refill throughout the school day.</p> <p>Water can be purchased at secondary school in PET plastic bottles. The choice of water in plastic bottles has been reduced to only provide one size plastic water bottle within the service. The service is committed to reducing plastics further and is currently</p>

	<p>looking into various options to reduce/remove single use plastic water bottles - one example of options being considered are high flow hydration stations being incorporated into all secondary school dining area. This hydration station has the potential to include still water and compliant cordial diluted for pupils to drink. There is also a possibility to explore other avenues such as outdoor water dispensers to allow pupils further access to fresh drinking water/top up water vessels/containers.</p> <p>Secondary pupils can access the existing water dispenser to fill up their own drinking vessel/container.</p>
<p>Dundee City</p>	<p>Dundee City Council use water coolers as the cost of single use bottled water wouldn't be sustainable. They make mains tap water available for use across their establishments.</p>
<p>East Ayrshire</p>	<p>There are no single-use bottles in primary schools in East Ayrshire, chilled water is available from machines managed daily by school staff.</p>
<p>East Dunbartonshire</p>	<p>Water is provided in reusable cups and jugs, which are cleaned daily. Pupils are normally encouraged to bring bottles with them, although some individual schools provide them automatically.</p> <p>East Dunbartonshire Council reported their procurement framework considers sustainability.</p>

<p>East Lothian</p>	<p>East Lothian Council have worked with individual settings and pupils to reduce plastic bottles in schools where this is practical. Plastic bottles are only available in primary schools on a Friday to those pupils who request one with their take away packed lunch. In secondary schools, pupils can purchase 500ml or 250ml plastic bottles of water from the food court.</p> <p>Efforts have been made to reduce reliance on large plastic bottle water dispensers/coolers in favour of mains-supplied chilled water dispensing machines. No large plastic bottle water dispensers/coolers now remain within East Lothian Council schools or offices, reducing reliance on plastics, electricity and the requirement for deliveries, servicing by a contractor etc.</p> <p>East Lothian Council have declared a climate emergency and are taking steps to ensure sustainability throughout its operations, including the provision of drinking water within schools, with a strong emphasis on and consideration of sustainability within procurement processes. They are in the process of moving away from single-use materials wherever possible.</p>
<p>East Renfrewshire</p>	<p>All food procurement frameworks include a scoring section in reference to sustainability, which can range from product specification details to recycling of packaging.</p>

	<p>With regards to East Renfrewshire Council's compliance with the '<i>How the authority is meeting the sustainability requirements under the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007</i>', both primary and secondary sectors in the area do not use disposable cups or packaging for providing food to young people unless they are required to ensure food safety.</p>
Falkirk	<p>Falkirk Council work on a presumption against single use plastic bottles or cups.</p> <p>They also encourage and educate pupils to use re-useable bottles or cups. Plus pupils have access to drinking water in all of the area's schools, where they can top up water bottles.</p>
Fife	<p>Provision of water in Fife schools depends on local infrastructure. This is normally through the school's mains supply, although if this was not possible for any reason then large bottles would be made available instead.</p>
Glasgow City	<p>In our schools we are guided by the UNCRC and the Sustainable Development Goals. We would consider article 24 about young people's health and wellbeing and Sustainable Development Goal 3 when making decisions about the provision of water in schools.</p>
Inverclyde	<p>Inverclyde Council makes sure water is readily available through water fountains throughout the school day.</p>

<p>Midlothian</p>	<p>Single use bottles are only used for the provision free school meals packed lunches on Fridays. Midlothian Council report this policy would be amended if reusable bottles were made available.</p>
<p>Moray</p>	<p>Schools in Moray adopt an ethos of promoting positive health and wellbeing in a range of experiences. Schools strive to provide a nurturing environment to support active lifestyles, personal care and wellbeing and to support emotional regulation allowing pupils to make balanced choices for lunches and snacks. They support pupils to develop healthy habits for life that have little environmental impact.</p> <p>Children are encouraged to be physically active throughout the school day and bring a reusable water bottle to school which they can fill up as and when required. Water is available whenever needed by the use of water fountains and is also provided at meal times in water jugs in school dining areas.</p> <p>All children are able to access and are regularly reminded about staying hydrated with staff making regular offers throughout the day to refill water bottles or use reusable cups.</p>
<p>Perth and Kinross</p>	<p>Water is made available through fountains and pupils encouraged to bring bottles with them, whilst jugs of water and reusable cups are used for the primary school lunch service.</p>

	<p>Single-use plastic bottles are still used for secondary lunches but Perth and Kinross Council are working with suppliers to consider more economically viable options.</p>
Renfrewshire	<p>Reusable cups are used whenever serving water in Renfrewshire Council's schools.</p>
Shetland Islands	<p>Primary and junior secondaries have reusable cups, plus water fountains are used in some schools where pupils can top-up.</p> <p>Plastic bottles used in secondaries, although these can still be topped up at water fountains. Shetland Islands Council would like to expand water fountain availability, but experience difficulty in getting suppliers to service them.</p>
South Ayrshire	<p>Water is provided through energy-efficient water coolers connected to schools' mains supply in South Ayrshire.</p>
South Lanarkshire	<p>South Lanarkshire Council previously had a contract that provided water to primary schools in individual single use plastic bottles, this stopped a number of years ago.</p> <p>Their schools now have water fountains, for which children and families are encouraged to bring their own reusable bottle from home and they can top up throughout the day. Although plastic, the cups that are available at lunch or other times should a child need a drink - but doesn't have their water bottle.</p>

	There are reusable plastic cups for this purpose.
Stirling	Stirling Council currently hold the Silver Food For Life accreditation that sees us only procuring locally sourced , sustainable and ethically sourced products with in our school meals service.
West Dunbartonshire	<p>Jugs are available in primary schools, including during breakfast and lunch.</p> <p>Water fountains are available in secondary schools and they can be used to top-up. Canteens stock also plastic water bottles for free school meals eligible pupils, which can be reused at the water fountains or recycled.</p>
West Lothian	<p>West Lothian Council ensures that the Sustainable Procurement Duty is considered in all their regulated procurements. The Council's procurement unit aims to achieve efficiencies and savings for West Lothian citizens and to support sustainable development objectives.</p> <p>Reusable tetra-packs are provided on Fridays to free school meals eligible pupils</p>

Question 3: The Scottish Government does not prescribe a nationwide approach to provision of water in schools, nor plans for a national procurement exercise recognising that what might work for one local authority may not for another, however, where individual local authorities take the decision to provide reusable metal water bottles, please tell us if you would be interested in participating in a national procurement exercise.

Local Authority	Yes	Depends whether funding is provided	No
Aberdeen City	X		
Aberdeenshire		X	
Angus		X	
Argyll & Bute	X		
Clackmannanshire			X
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar*	X		X
Dumfries and Galloway			X
Dundee City			X [#]
East Ayrshire	X		
East Dunbartonshire		X	X
East Lothian			X
East Renfrewshire		X	
Falkirk			X

Fife		X	
Glasgow City			X
Inverclyde			X
Midlothian	X		
Moray			X
Perth and Kinross			X [#]
Renfrewshire		X	
Shetland Islands	X		
South Ayrshire			X
South Lanarkshire			X
Stirling	X		
West Dunbartonshire			X
West Lothian			X

* We received responses directly from some schools in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, some schools indicated a willingness to participate whilst others preferred to retain local flexibility

Dundee City and Perth and Kinross Councils did not indicate interest at present but, if a supply framework were to become established, they would consider joining it