

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 13 November 2024
17th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

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

Introduction

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>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 24 January 2024](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.
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 a new written submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills which is set out in **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 gave its initial response to the petition on 21 September](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 184 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
November 2024

Annexe A: Summary of petition

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.

CPPP/S6/24/17/5

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 Official Report of last consideration of PE1896 on 24 January 2024

The Convener: The next petition is PE1896, which seeks to provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle. Members might recall that the petition was lodged by Callum Isted, who, at the age of just seven and still in primary school, was the Parliament's youngest ever petitioner. I have to say that the petition has been open for so long that he is now almost heading off to secondary school. The petition itself 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.

We last considered the petition at our meeting on 19 April 2023, when we agreed to write both to the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity and to the then First Minister. We requested information on the methods of water provision in each local authority-run school and on how authorities are meeting their sustainability requirements. We were particularly keen to hear whether local authorities would be interested in participating in a national procurement exercise for the supply of reusable metal water bottles.

The Scottish Government received responses from 26 local authorities, and a summary of those findings has been provided as a written submission. It reveals that the automatic provision of reusable water bottles to pupils, or the use of single-use bottles, is not an authority-wide policy in any Scottish local authority area. Of the responses, 15 noted that single-use bottles are available in schools; of those, 13 also offered reusable plastic cups and the remaining two provided reusable water bottles. We heard that 13 councils indicated that they would be interested in taking part in a national procurement exercise, while 12 clearly stated that they would not. Of those that marked no, six already provided reusable water bottles.

Sue Webber, who was previously present with Callum Isted and his family, is unable to attend our meeting this morning as she is convening the Education, Children and Young People Committee's stage 2 proceedings elsewhere in the Parliament. However, she has asked that her support for Callum's petition and on-going campaign work be noted on the record.

I come back to what, for me, is still quite a vivid memory of Callum Isted presenting his petition. Against a background of so much emphasis being placed on education and change of practice in the next generation, he came forward with a petition designed to achieve a material and practical change. There does seem to be interest in his proposal—at least from the 13 heroic councils that said that they might consider a national procurement exercise.

Do members have any suggestions for action that we might take?

David Torrance: Considering that 13 councils have expressed an interest in a national procurement exercise, the committee could write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to ask whether, in light of the response from local authorities, she would consider progressing the petition's aims with the 13 councils that indicated an interest in a national procurement service.

Foyso! Choudhury: We should congratulate the petitioner, because reusable water bottles have a lot of environmental benefits and encourage kids to drink more water.

The Convener: Absolutely. We should congratulate the petitioner again. When writing to the cabinet secretary, we might point out that, although Mr Isted is not an ageing individual, unlike me and other members of the committee, he is set to leave primary school eventually, so it would be nice if we were able to take forward, to some extent, the aims of his petition.

Do we agree to take that approach?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submission

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 12 March 2024

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

Thank you for your further letter in relation to the above petition, which seeks to provide a reusable metal water bottle for all children in primary schools. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Firstly, I would like to let the committee know that I met with Callum Isted and his father at the Scottish Parliament on 25 January where we discussed his petition. I informed Callum that I would raise his petition when I meet with Cllr Tony Buchanan who is the spokesperson for children and young people at COSLA.

I note the contents from the official report of the meeting of your committee on 24 January where you discussed potential local authority participation in a national procurement exercise to purchase water bottles for their schools. As you are aware, the work which we carried out at the request of the Committee identified that only 13 of the 32 local authorities would have any interest in a national procurement exercise, with six of those indicating they would do so only if it was centrally funded.

This work also demonstrated that many local authorities already have centrally available water supply points where pupils can top-up their water bottles at any time. Furthermore, some schools are also supplying drinking vessels such as reusable cups or encouraging pupils to re-use their water bottles by topping them up at the available water fountains. Taking account of these responses from local authorities, the Scottish Government does not intend to take forward work on a national procurement exercise at this time.

I am aware that my predecessor as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Anne Somerville, had previously written to the Directors of Education at all local authorities drawing their attention to Callum's petition. This was done to help reinforce the message, at the highest levels within local authority education departments, that sustainability concerns should be taken into account when providing drinking water within schools.

I believe local authorities should retain the maximum flexibility to decide how they can best meet the needs of the pupils in their respective local areas when it comes to supplying water in schools. Our recent work in this area has provided some helpful evidence of actions which local authorities have already been taking to encourage more sustainability.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills