

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.”

Key Organisations and relevant links

COSLA

Zero Waste Scotland

Keep Scotland Beautiful

Sustainable Scotland Network

Ned Sharratt & Alexa Morrison

Senior Researchers

10/09/2021

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Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP