

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						
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>
Argyll & Bute	<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>
Clackmannanshire	<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>
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	<p>This matter seems to be decided locally by schools. Returns indicate some schools encourage pupils bringing their own bottles,</p>

	<p>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>
Dumfries and Galloway	<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 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>
Dundee City	<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>
East Ayrshire	<p>There are no single-use bottles in primary schools in East Ayrshire, chilled water is</p>

	available from machines managed daily by school staff.
East Dunbartonshire	<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>
East Lothian	<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>
East Renfrewshire	All food procurement frameworks include a scoring section in reference to sustainability,

	<p>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 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>
Midlothian	<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>
Moray	<p>Schools in Moray adopt an ethos of promoting positive health and wellbeing in a range of experiences. Schools strive to</p>

	<p>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>
Perth and Kinross	<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	Water is provided through energy-efficient water coolers connected to schools' mains supply in South Ayrshire.
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. There are reusable plastic cups for this purpose.</p>
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	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. Reusable tetra-packs are provided on Fridays to free school meals eligible pupils

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