

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 11 June 2002

DRINKING WATER IN SCHOOLS

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This report advises members of proposals to improve drinking water facilities in schools.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee notes the contents of this report and approves the recommended improvements.

2. BACKGROUND

There is a requirement under Health and Safety Legislation to give staff and pupils access to an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water. However, the Scottish Executive have identified a requirement to improve the existing regulatory framework and is currently preparing new regulations to comply with EC Directive 98/83/EC, particularly in respect of quality control and non compliance. While the Education Department meets its legal obligation in providing drinking water and monitors quality, research has shown there are considerable benefits in encouraging pupils to drink more water.

3. CURRENT POSITION

3.1 Survey

Following discussions at the Departmental Health & Safety Committee, Angus schools have been surveyed to ascertain their position with regard to drinking water.

Staff and pupils in all schools have access to safe drinking water. In all but two of the schools in Angus pupils have access to a mains fed drinking water supply; it is planned that the situation in both these schools will be rectified as part of the proposed improvement programme. Generally mains fed water has a more pleasant taste compared to water provided through a tank. It should be noted that further consideration of the detailed position in each school is ongoing as part of the Asset Management Planning process.

3.2 Health & Safety Legislation

By giving staff and pupils access to an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water the Education Department is in compliance with various Health & Safety Regulations including "The Health & Safety At Work Act 1974", "The Health & Safety At Work Regulations 1999" and in particular "Regulation 22" of "The Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992, " which deals specifically with drinking water.

However, most taps in schools draw their water from storage tanks, which can give the water a slightly unpleasant taste. In addition, water drawn from tanks will almost certainly be warmer than water from mains fed taps. Although water from all taps in school comply with water regulation by-law 30 which is part of the "Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 2001", this basically means that the water is safe to drink. The quality and taste of the water from storage tanks in most cases is poor.

Drinking fountains are generally situated in toilets which can be an unappealing environment in which to drink water.

4. BENEFITS OF IMPROVING PROVISION OF WATER

There are a number of bodies interested in improving the quality of water and the availability of water in public buildings and in particularly schools. Organisations such as "Enuresis Resource and Information Centre" along with other educationalists and organisations have carried out research on the benefits of children being properly hydrated. These studies have shown that the benefits of sufficient fluid intake are in stark contrast to the effects of children not drinking sufficient water - headache, fatigue, poor concentration and many kidney problems are often a direct result of insufficient fluid intake which has long been identified as having a serious effect on performance and health. Schools which have encouraged children to drink more have reported many benefits including better concentration, fewer headaches, improved behaviour and better academic performance.

Children are at greater risk of becoming dehydrated than adults for several reasons including:-

- the lack of access to a palatable water supply during the school day.
- they have a larger surface area compared to their volume (which leads to relatively more water being lost by the body).
- they may not recognise the thirst signal because they may not be in the habit of drinking enough.

There is clearly a desire to encourage children to drink more and to ensure that an easily accessible supply of wholesome drinking water is available. The experiences of schools which have introduced a scheme to encourage children to drink more water show that children value being allowed to drink water at school and that allowing drinking water into the classroom need not lead to disruption. Non-spill sports top bottles can limit the mess or damage to books if bottles are knocked over and are also attractive to pupils themselves.

5. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS

Given the various legislation which now covers the supply of drinking water it is proposed that existing mains water supplies in schools be clearly marked to ensure that pupils and staff are directed towards a good quality source of drinking water. In addition it is proposed to augment the existing sources of water to improve the availability to pupils (ie at least one drinking tap per hundred pupils). While most Angus schools, particularly primary schools, already meet this criteria a number do not and in some schools water is not available in the most appropriate location. In addition to the traditional fountain type outlet additional sources being available would enable pupils to fill 'sports type' bottles to allow them to take drinking water into the classrooms. It is also proposed to relocate drinking fountains from toilets to more acceptable locations within schools.

To improve the current situation and to ensure facilities are not abused consultation with school staff and pupils is essential. Work should only be undertaken once locations and management arrangements had been agreed with individual schools. Schools should also have the opportunity to augment the level of provision through using their Devolved Budgets.

6. SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Having considered the various options available the preferred option is to provide a mains fed Water Fountain (at an approximate cost of £190 per installation) which is the most cost effective and safe means of providing wholesome water to school communities.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The work associated with ensuring that an acceptable source of drinking water is available to school staff and pupils could be carried out over 2 financial years at an estimated cost of £25,000, (i.e. £10,000 in 2002/03 and £15,000 in 2003/04). There is provision for this expenditure within the Education Department Revenue Budget.

In addition, if any school wishes additional facilities and/or an alternative supply, this could be purchased using the school's devolved budget.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS

There are no Human Rights implications arising directly from consideration of this report.

9. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, the Director of Finance, the Director of Law & Administration and the Director of Property Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report

10. CONCLUSION

The approach of improving provision and quality of drinking water in schools is consistent with the development of Health Promoting Schools and a number of benefits should accrue from this initiative. To be effective consultation and agreement with school staff and pupils regarding location and operation of the water supply will be essential.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extend in preparing the above report.