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5th September 2011

Councillor Peter Eddis
Chairman
Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Portsmouth City Council
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
PO1 2DP

Dear Councillor Eddis,

Water Fluoridation

At your last meeting on 21st July 2011, you received a written update from me on Water Fluoridation in Southampton. You resolved that "This committee treats any threat of fluoridation to Portsmouth Water Company area with concern. We welcome the removal of this threat until 2013. We request to be kept informed of any progress and any channels we can input into the decision-making process."

You also asked that I provide a response to the following questions:

1. Has oral health in Birmingham improved since the introduction of fluoridated water supplies?
2. What is the percentage of children that visit the dentist on a regular basis in Portsmouth?
3. What dental educational initiatives have been carried out in the area?
4. What can be learnt from initiatives in other areas?
5. Can you provide evidence of the positive impact that fluoridation has had on oral health in a city that has had recently introduced this?
6. What impact did fluoridation have on the health of residents in Birmingham?
7. What are the implications for people with medical conditions that are sensitive to fluoridation?

I would like to start by reaffirming that there are no plans by NHS Portsmouth or South Central Strategic Health Authority to formally consider taking steps to fluoridate the water in Portsmouth. This is because both organisations will cease to exist as a legal entity on 31 March 2013 and that would not allow sufficient time for the formal process as set out in the current legislation to run its full course by then even if we started today. The Health & Social Care Bill that is currently being debated in the House Of Commons, and shortly in the House of Lords, will need to set out a clear legislative framework for the future before any application for fluoridation could be made.

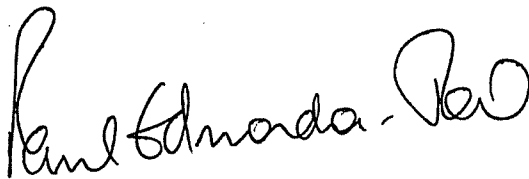
In 2004 the British Fluoridation Society, the UK Public Health Association, the British Dental Association and the Faculty of Public Health published an extensive document called One in a Million that set out the benefits of fluoridation. I would commend that document to all members of the Panel and will make arrangements to obtain copies for you. In the foreword the Chief Dental Officer said: *"The West Midlands and the North East have some of the best oral health in the UK, despite having significant areas of multiple deprivation. The almost unanimous agreed reason for this is that a large proportion of the population in these areas receives fluoridated drinking water and has done so for a considerable time. It has been the policy of successive governments that health communities in areas of high dental disease should have the option of fluoridating the drinking water. The present government signalled its support for the targeted use of fluoridation to reduce oral health inequalities in Health of the Nation, Modernising NHS Dentistry (NHS Plan) and the Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health (the Acheson Report) also commended fluoridation."* Fluoridation has been clearly supported by successive Governments, by successive Chief Medical Officers and Chief Dental Officers for England, by the British Medical and Dental Associations and by the Faculty for Public Health and the UK Public Health Association.

In the light of this very strong endorsement by the Government and by many other leading medical and dental organisations nationally and internationally, I am extremely disappointed that the Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel has chosen to describe possible fluoridation as a "threat". Given the very high level of oral health problems in our City and the very significant number of tooth extractions that need to be performed annually on our children, fluoridation should be seen as a very real "opportunity". It may not be an "opportunity" that the City wants to take up but surely it is not a "threat" if it significantly improves the oral health of our population.

I am sadly unable to be at the Panel meeting today but I have asked Dr Jeyanthi John, Consultant in Dental Public Health for Southampton, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth, to come to the meeting and give a short presentation to answer the questions you have posed. Jeyanthi has huge professional expertise in the area of Dental Public Health and has played a key leading role in the process of fluoridation in Southampton. I know that you will be impressed by her expertise in the subject and hope that you will find her presentation and arguments compelling.

If there are any subsequent questions or anything that remains unanswered after the meeting then I am happy to come to the next meeting and discuss them further. However, I would want to reemphasise that, notwithstanding the huge benefits that I can see from fluoridation, there is no practical way in which we could take the matter forward in the next 18 months at least.

Yours faithfully



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