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26 May 2010

The Rt Hon Andrew Lansley CBE MP  
Secretary of State  
Department of Health  
Richmond House  
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Dear Secretary of State

**Proposals to add fluoride to drinking water in Southampton and south west Hampshire**

I am writing in the hope that you will be able to resolve a long standing impasse that we have reached in Hampshire in relation to the above proposals from South Central Strategic Health Authority.

The grounds on which we are making this request are not those of the relative merits of adding fluoride to water supplies (although we can provide a significant amount of information in this respect) but the total lack of accountability of the SHA - an unelected body - in imposing this action on local people despite their opposition.

During its passage through Parliament the Act that made it possible for the SHA to determine if fluoride could be added to a population's water supply was challenged on a number of fronts. As a consequence repeated assurances were given by Ministers that this should only happen with the support of local people - a point that was later reiterated by the former Prime Minister when he visited the area recently. The consultation process conducted by the SHA resulted in 72% of the responses received stating that they did not wish to have fluoride added to drinking water. A subsequent telephone poll conducted by the SHA also resulted in a majority of people stating they did not support the proposal. Despite this the SHA Board approved the proposal to add fluoride to the water supply to parts of Southampton and south west Hampshire.

All local authorities affected by the proposal have clearly stated their opposition to it, as the initial support indicated by Southampton City Council was overturned at a recent meeting because of the strength of public feeling about the imposition of this action. A Judicial Review of the decision is currently before the courts, one of the grounds being the failure of the SHA to take account of the views of local people.

In addition to the lack of accountability demonstrated by the SHA there is a further issue about the use of public funding at a time when we are all facing significant financial challenges. The cost of taking this proposal forward has significantly exceeded the initial estimates of the consultation exercise and a further £400,000 has been set aside to fight the Judicial Review. Additionally flaws have been identified in the original technical and economic feasibility studies that suggest that implementation will be far more costly than anticipated and secure fewer cost benefits. Despite repeated requests from the Hampshire HOSC, the SHA has not been able to confirm the final costs of implementing this programme. This is a nonsense in the current economic climate.

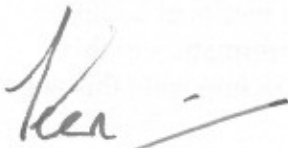
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We all wish to work together to improve the health of our children including oral health. The intention of the new Government to introduce a new dentistry contract will be a significant step forward with this ambition. If local people are of the view that the addition of fluoride to drinking water in their area is an acceptable complement to this and other measures to improve oral health then the case put forward by the SHA may be supportable. In this instance the views of our population and locally elected representatives have been comprehensively ignored, incurring significant avoidable expenditure and public anger.

It is on this basis that I ask you to intervene to require the SHA to act in accordance with the outcome of its own consultation process and honour the commitments given previously by Ministers.

I am able to provide you with further background information in support of this request if you feel this would be helpful but I suspect that you have more than enough paper to deal with at present!

Yours sincerely



Ken Thornber  
Leader

Cc: Caroline Nokes MP  
Chris Huhne MP  
Dr Julian Lewis MP  
Desmond Swayne MP  
Dr Caroline Lucas MEP  
Andrew Smith, Chief Executive, Hampshire County Council  
Hampshire County Council Members  
Councillor Keith House, Leader, Eastleigh Borough Council  
Councillor Barry Rickman, Leader, New Forest District Council  
Councillor Ian Carr, Leader, Test Valley Borough Council  
Cllr Dame Margaret Eaton DBE, Chairman, Local Government Association  
Sir Iain Chalmers, Editor, The James Lind Library  
Professor Trevor Sheldon, Health Services Research, University of York  
The Earl Baldwin of Bewdley  
Dr Geoff Harris, Chairman, South Central SHA