

SUNDERLAND HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

20 March 2020

COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION

Report of the Director of Public Health

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update in relation to the consideration of introducing a Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) scheme in Sunderland.
- 1.2 It also seeks to gain the views of members of the Board about how best to carry out the public consultation that is required when considering such schemes.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in the environment. When combined with other minerals it can be used to strengthen tooth enamel.
- 2.2 CWF schemes enable the addition of fluoride to the drinking water supply. They adjust the naturally occurring level of fluoride in the water to an optimum concentration of around 1 part per million.
- 2.3 In the North East, CWF schemes are in place in Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead, parts of County Durham (Derwentside) and parts of Northumberland (Hexham and Alnwick). The water supply in Hartlepool contains fluoride from natural sources.
- 2.4 Fluoride is most commonly applied to the teeth via fluoride toothpaste. Where it is added to drinking water, it combines with developing teeth in children to become part of tooth enamel. This makes teeth stronger and more resistant to decay. This is especially important in Sunderland as 28.4% of 5-year-olds experience tooth decay which is significantly higher than the average for England at 23.3% (see attached 2017 Dental Health Profile – Sunderland).
- 2.5 In adults, when it is consumed via the water supply, it works with saliva to protect tooth enamel from plaque and sugars.
- 2.6 Drinking water in Sunderland is mainly sourced from elevated areas in County Durham. This means it can be delivered almost entirely under gravity. It flows through Sunderland to reach South Tyneside. So, it makes sense when considering local CWF schemes to look to arrangements across the region (see attached joint report *“Improving oral health through community water fluoridation”*).
- 2.7 Community water fluoridation is expressly permitted in legislation by Parliament. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 amended the Water Industry Act 1991 and returned responsibility for decisions on community water fluoridation to local authorities as part of their public health responsibilities. Legislation is in place to govern the way in

which a new scheme can be introduced by local authorities and how an established scheme may be varied or terminated.

3.0 CURRENT POSITION

3.1 Considering a CWF Scheme involves a number of key steps:

- a. Establishing whether the scheme is feasible, and if so, what would be the associated costs and infrastructure requirements
- b. Requesting an opinion from the Secretary of State regarding whether any proposed scheme is “operable and efficient”
- c. Carrying out public consultation with all those affected – this would be overseen by a committee (this can take various forms, though has to suit the arrangements of the scheme).

3.2 A decision to proceed with the consultation phase was taken at Cabinet on 11 February 2020 and supporting materials are currently being prepared.

3.3 Prior to public consultation, a phase of engagement will take place to help shape the way it will be delivered. This is to help understand the best ways to reach as many people as possible to gain their views.

3.4 CWF is a population level intervention. So, if it was implemented in Sunderland, anybody that receives water from the public supply would be affected. It is likely to specifically benefit children (in particular those who experience deprivation/disadvantage), adults who experience deprivation/disadvantage and people with physical and/or learning disabilities (who may find it more difficult to brush their own teeth effectively).

3.5 There are some challenges to communicating about CWF. To some people, it may appear to be a complex subject which has arguments both in its favour and against it. There is also a wide range of information available online, which may prove to confuse some people.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

- Receive the information provided in relation to CWF and feedback any views to inform the development of the planned public consultation.