Health bosses are to go ahead and fluoridate the water in Southampton, despite 72 per cent of residents objecting to the idea.

The decision, which will affect around 200,000 people, follows a large public consultation and months of debate.

Jim Easton, the South Central Strategic Health Authority’s (SCSHA) chief executive, said: ‘We recognise that water fluoridation is a contentious issue for some people. The board was satisfied that, based on existing research, water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to improve dental health.’

Bob Deans, chief executive for Southampton City Primary Care Trust (PCT) said: ‘Southampton City PCT continues to believe that a water fluoridation scheme, when introduced with continued oral health promotion, will be the most effective way of reducing the large numbers of tooth fillings and extractions currently needed by children in Southampton.’

The British Dental Association (BDA) also welcomed the decision which it claims has been supported by dentists in the region.

The BDA’s scientific adviser, Professor Damien Walmsley said: ‘The BDA commends South Central’s decision as we believe that fluoridation is a safe and effective method of reducing dental decay and oral health inequalities. We look forward to the day when we see fewer children in Southampton having to endure the pain and discomfort of dental treatment or the trauma of having a tooth extracted as a result of adopting this initiative.’

In Southampton, four in every 10 children have a filling by the time they start school.

The decision by South Central Strategic Health Authority to fluoridate water, is the first under 2005 laws, giving health authorities powers to demand the service from water companies.

The decision by the SHA will enable the PCT to go ahead and ask Southern Water to add the chemical to the water, probably by 2010.

A three-month consultation on the plans revealed that 72 per cent of 10,000 local people were opposed to the scheme.

John Spittalwood, chairman of Hampshire Against Fluoridation, called it ‘absolutely disgraceful’ and said: ‘They have refused to listen to all the evidence we have given them. They have ignored the will of the people – 72 per cent didn’t want it and yet they still are going to do it. It is deeply unethical.’

Anti-fluoridation campaigners claim it is ‘mass medication’ and that it is linked to health risks such as bone cancer and hip fractures. It also increases fluorosis (staining) of teeth.

Elizabeth McDonagh, chair of the National Pure Water Association, said it was time for legal action against the scheme in Southampton. She claims the health authorities blatantly promoted fluoridation during the three-month consultation and called the consultation a ‘sham and a waste of public money’.

SHAs are required to make decisions on the ‘cogency of the arguments’ and not simply on numbers of people and organisations for or against proposals.

Authorities in north-west England, Derbyshire, Bristol, and Kirklees in West Yorkshire are thought to be among those preparing to go down the same route.

Fluoride is currently added to the water drunk by about 5.3m people in England, a ninth of the population, mainly in Barmingham and the West Midlands and parts of the north-east.

The government wants to target fluoridation in areas affected by high levels of dental decay which is mainly deprived areas, where nutrition and oral health care is poorest.

The Scottish government already decided four years ago that it did not want local authorities to have the power to bring in fluoridation. The Isle of Man abandoned the idea last summer.

Money Matters

Pension protection

Are you doing all that you can to maximise your pension position? Whatever you do – don’t get hit by the tax men says Ray Prince.

Tricky reactions

More people than ever before have an allergy to something, but what do you do if your patients are allergic to you? Mahri explains.

Clinical

Keeping fit

Composite is a fantastic material with an abundance of uses, but are you making the most of it? Philip Lewis shares his ideas.

Events

Helping hand

Read how Dental Hygienist, Barbara Koffman travelled to Uganda to promote and improve dental facilities with her team.

Sponsored silence

A dental nurse in Hereford held a sponsored silence to raise money for Breast Cancer Haven. Kate Beale, who works at Smith, Coleman and Holloman Dental Practice in Bromyard, kept a day of silence in support of a relative with cancer.

Tribune correction

Dental Tribune would like to apologise for printing Simon Hocken’s details incorrectly in the previous issue. Hocken can be contacted at The Breathe Business Group by emailing simon@novobreathe.co.uk or calling 01548 853660. More information can be found at www.novobreathe.co.uk

Dentistry statistics

Chief Dental Officer, Barry Cockcroft has welcomed the latest access dentistry statistics from the NHS Information Centre. The figures showed an increase of 400,000 (2.4 per cent) in the course of treatment delivered by NHS dentists, in 2008/09 from the same period last year.

Dr Cockcroft said: ‘This is good news for patients. Access to NHS dentistry is improving following record investment, expanding workforce and a continuing increase in the amount of services being bought by the NHS. The record access data means we are only just beginning to see evidence of the growth in NHS dental services that has been going on over the past couple of years. We want to ensure that every person who wants an NHS dentist can get one, and have invested a record £2bn in dentistry and set up a national access programme to help the NHS deliver this.’

Full-time MP

A dentist in Paisley in Scotland wants to leave dentistry behind and become a full-time MP. Anas Sarwar is the number one choice for the Labour party to stand in the Glasgow Central seat at the next election. Mr Sarwar has been a dentist in Paisley for three and a half years but has always wanted to go into politics, having been a Labour supporter since he was 16. The 25-year-old said his bosses and colleagues at Rodwell and Associates on Causeside Street have been very understanding over his political ambitions.