SHAs to be axed by 2012 says Dept of Health

Decision welcomed by Southampton residents opposing water supply fluoridation plans

All Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) are to be abolished by 2012.

The Department of Health (DH) broke the news to the SHAs through a Q&A document which said: “Subject to legislation, the new independent NHS commissioning board will become fully operational from April 2012, removing the need for separate statutory strategic health authorities”.

The Department of Health claims that the new independent NHS board will combine functions currently provided by the DH and SHAs, and deliver those in a much more streamlined way.

The move has been welcomed in places such as Southampton where the SHAs decision to approve water fluoridation has been vehemently opposed.

Stephen Peckham, chairman of Hampshire Against Fluoridation, said he is encouraged by the news, particularly as those now in office are not keen to force fluoridation without proper public consultation.

All fluoride schemes across the country are currently on hold while the courts examine the decision by South Central SHA in February 2009 to add fluoride to the water in 200,000 homes in Southampton and parts of Hampshire. The judicial review is to be heard in the Autumn, according to the new Health Minister Simon Burns.

Southampton resident Geraldine Milner is arguing that the SHA should have listened to the views of residents before giving the scheme the go-ahead, after 72 per cent of 10,000 people consulted said they were against the idea.

In response to a question in parliament from Dr Julian Lewis over the government’s fluoridation policy, Conservative MP for New Forest East, Mr Burns said: “Section 58 of the Water Act 2003 empowers Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) to contract with water undertakings to fluoridate a water supply after conducting public consultations. It is essential that any consultation gives people a real opportunity to make their views known and that those views are taken into account before a final decision is made. The decision by South Central SHA to approve the fluoridation of water supplies to the Southampton area is the subject of a judicial review, which is likely to be heard in the autumn, and so due to the legal challenge the Department is unable to comment.”