



National Audit Office

The UK's independent public spending
watchdog

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NAO ASSESSMENTS INTO WATER FLUORIDATION EXPENDITURE IN ENGLAND

Thank you for your request of 25th September 2023 for details on whether the government has commissioned the NAO to examine the costs associated with water fluoridation in England. We have considered your request under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004. Your specific request is set out in **Annex A** for reference.

We have searched our records and can confirm that we do not hold the information that you requested within the scope of your request. We have not carried out any examinations into water fluoridation into England. We also cannot comment if the NAO looking into this, would be a prerequisite for proceeding with any expansion.

Annex B sets out the steps you may wish to take if you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your request for information under FOIA.

I am sorry that we don't hold the specific information that you requested on this occasion.

Yours sincerely,

NAO FOI Team



Annex A

Request for information about the costs associated with water fluoridation in England:

(Your response is in italic below)

Please treat this as a formal request under current FOI legislation.

15 years or so ago, your predecessors the Audit Commission published a report, commissioned by the then government, which endorsed supporting wider fluoridation of public water supplies, claiming that there was a sound economic and VFM basis for such a policy. I read their report closely and it included no analysis whatsoever of initial capital costs and no estimates of ongoing maintenance and increased running costs, an omission I queried at the time without receiving a satisfactory explanation. That report also contained contradictory claims about the level of effectiveness of this 'strategy' quoting two sources as references, one of which (The British Fluoridation Society) claimed a 50% reduction in dental caries levels and the other - the York Review commissioned by HMG and published in 2000 - identifying an average 14.6% reduction. That was never satisfactorily explained either.

Last year HMG legislated to extend fluoridation nationwide. It is my understanding of current government custom and practice in relation to such proposed programs involving increased spending that the OBR is duty bound to undertake an analytical exercise to underpin economic case for the putative changes. Soon after that legislation was passed, the CATFISH study, also commissioned by the government, using solid data from Cumbria, established that there was minimal benefit derived from fluoridation there and certainly no additional benefit for children from poorer social classes, which is supposedly the raison d'etre of this 'strategy'. The OBR have advised me that they have not been asked to do an analysis of the potential costs or VFM of this proposed policy extension and suggested to me that the NAO might be better placed to provide the requested substantive information.

I would be grateful therefore if you could please advise or confirm:

(i) Since that legislation was passed just over a year ago, has the government commissioned any exercise or analysis by the NAO to examine the potential capital and ongoing maintenance and running costs of the proposed expansion of fluoridation of public water supplies in England?

(ii) Would the NAO anticipate that, in the normal scheme of things, such an exercise would be a pre-requisite for proceeding with such a proposed expansion, involving as it would a considerable extra outlay of public money in both capital costs and ongoing revenue commitments?

Annex B

Statement of Policy

Our policy is to respond to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as helpfully and promptly as possible, having regard to the principles set out in the Act. I therefore hope you are happy with the way we have handled your request. If you are not, then you should take the following steps.

In the first instance, within 40 working days, write to the National Audit Office Freedom of Information (FOI) Team at FOI@nao.org.uk or by post to:

FOI Team, Green 2, National Audit Office, 157-197 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 9SP

The Head of FOI will arrange a review, which will be conducted by a senior member of staff who was not involved in decisions relating to your original request. Once the review has been completed, we will write informing you of the outcome.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The primary way of escalating your concerns to the Information Commissioner is at: <https://ico.org.uk/foicomplaints>.

Alternatively, you can contact the ICO at <https://ico.org.uk/> or Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF.