

Minutes – PFAS meeting with Islanders

Thursday 8th December 2022

Liberation Suite, Pomme d'Or Hotel

Government Attendees

Deputy Kristina Moore, Chief Minister

Deputy Karen Wilson, Minister for Health and Social Services

Deputy Jonathan Renouf, Minister for Environment

Professor Peter Bradley, Director of Public Health

Grace Norman, Deputy Director of Public Health

Dr Tim du Feu, Head of Land Resource Management

Opening presentations

- The meeting opened at 09:10
- The Chief Minister (CM) introduced the meeting, noting that the time and venue weren't the preference for the attendees, and that some of those invited had been unable to make it
- The CM said that today's meeting was about listening and that there was a Government willingness to act
- CM confirmed that a location in St Peter would be found next time
- CM introduced Professor Peter Bradley (PB), Director of Public Health.
- PB explained the structure to the day, which began with a summary of blood test results
- Grace Norman (GN), Deputy Director of Public Health, explained some of the challenges with interpreting the results, for example, there was no international agreement on how to interpret blood test results
- Advice had therefore been sought from a World Health Organisation (WHO) expert as to whether the approach being taken by Jersey was reasonable
- GN explained the comparison between the Jersey results to those conducted on a sample population in the USA.

- PB described the results as “concerning”, and that now the focus is on what to do about it
- Public Health officials had identified potential international PFAS experts who may be qualified to sit on the panel
- Public Health are keen for Islanders representation to support the process of development of the panel by reviewing the documentation (e.g. the panel’s terms of reference)
- The intention of today was to receive feedback and input to ensure the approach taken by Public Health is the right one, and that they are on the right track, asking the right questions
- PB set out the proposal for a Scientific Advisory Panel, and what the questions should be for that Panel to address
- The proposal is for the Panel to be constituted wholly of international independent experts
- PB set out the proposal for venesection (bloodletting) and recognised there had been a request for this service
- It was proposed that the Panel be asked for their recommendation on if this should be taken forward, how it could be done so, and for them to comment on safety.
- Dr Tim du Feu spoke about the environmental work taking place in respect of PFAS
- Dr du Feu noted that it is becoming possible to test for more chemicals and types of PFAS
- The environmental work also included assessing plume areas in St Ouen’s Bay, at Pont Marquet, the airport, any wider distribution around the Island (to ensure there aren’t any other hotspots), ensuring public water was safe and keeping everyone informed
- This would include options for “clean up” of PFAS.
- Dr du Feu noted that PFAS is everywhere, including in everyday products, so it will usually be found when tested for
- Tests so far had indicated low levels of PFAS in Jersey’s mains water supplies, which were under WHO limits
- Officials were planning to use the website as a platform to publish information about PFAS and the Government’s progress on the recommendations set out in the 2019 report. .

Feedback, Discussion and Questions

The meeting was opened up for questions and feedback from everyone present. These are recorded below, along with responses where they were provided.

Q) When will the States take responsibility for what happened? The States wilfully allowed a chemical to go into the ground and into the water table.

- Dr du Feu answered that, at the time (early 2000s), PFAS was the chemical used to extinguish airport fires. This reflected best practice at the time. It was recognised that best practice has moved on.
- The focus now is to see what can be done to resolve the position that we are in.

Q) Was it 2000 when the States first knew about PFAS? What did the company (3M) say about PFAS/what had happened?

Discussions

- A comment was offered on the 3M Hazard Fire data sheet, and that data from 3M showed that the airport fire service wasn't adhering to best practice. The gentleman speaking agreed to share this information with officials
- General discontent was expressed at the conduct of 3M, who had remained anonymous when the agreement was signed with the States in the early 2000s
- Discontent was also expressed at the delay in some instances of alerting people to the problem. It was stated that, even when some households were connected/switched to mains water, they weren't told why or had the problem explained to them
- Examples were given of health issues which started in the late 1990s/early 2000s
- The CM accepted and recognised the concerns that people had and the issues they faced. CM understood why people wanted to express their frustrations. The CM nevertheless asked if we could look forward to consider how we might deal with the problems
- A comment was made that everyone in the room was ill, people in the room were not ok, they are becoming more ill and don't have time to wait for an Advisory Panel
- PB said that the Advisory Panel would be set up quickly (it wouldn't take a year), so they can advise on treatments.

Q) Will support be available for accessing GPs, and paying for parking when doing so?

- There is a designated GP who can advise if someone's regular GP feels unable to.

Q) Will these questions be made available, and answers provided? Will there be an email to send questions into?

- Confirmation was given in both respects.
- [If Islanders have questions they would like to be considered by the panel, which were not raised during this meeting, please send them to Publichealth@gov.je]

Q) What support will there be for younger people, who will have their own children in future, to make sure the effects aren't passed from generation to generation?

- PB said this was a point which could be put to the Scientific Advisory Panel.

Q) Are there plans to offer any thorough medical screenings/assessments to highlight any common conditions?

- PB said this was a point which could be put to the Panel, and noted that this would be important for the individuals affected.

Q) Can the blood testing be extended to include household members who aren't showing health issues (e.g. to deal with concerns for children and to avoid generation to generation spread)?

- This question will be added to the list for the Scientific Advisory Panel

Q) Are there plans for people whose only source of water is their contaminated borehole?

- Dr du Feu said he would take details of instances where this was the case, as his understanding is that everyone was now on mains water.

Q) Would we pay for connections to the mains supply for those who are still on borehole and wish to transfer?

- Dr du Feu noted that this would depend on where the plume has spread to, and what the PFAS levels are in their supply.

Q) Is there a plan to test other Islanders so we can compare the results of those in the plume area with those living elsewhere?

- This question will be added to the list for the Scientific Advisory Panel

Discussion

- A comment was made that the water in St Ouen's Bay will always be contaminated because of other activities in the area (e.g. dumping of materials). This has been going on for many years.

Q) What will you do with the soil dug out from the bay?

- This depends on levels detected in the soil. It could be secured in a location somewhere in the Island or perhaps sent off Island.

Q) Can we be pro-active in identifying who might have high levels of PFAS?

Q) There is overwhelming circumstantial evidence of health risks. What will the Health Minister do to recognise health risks and concerns?

- The Health Minister confirmed that support will be provided for GPs and that the Government would be proactive in offering health support and in managing conditions.

Q) Can those in attendance propose names for membership of the Advisory Panel?

- This would be welcomed. Suggestions can be sent to publichealth@gov.je

Q) An attendee asked if she could be a member of the Scientific Panel?

- Professor Bradley answered that the intention was to keep the Panel independent so the membership will be international professionals.

Q) Could impacted Islanders be observers of the Panel?

- Professor Bradley confirmed this would be investigated.

Q) Can confirmation be given that desalination plant water has no PFAS?

- Dr du Feu confirmed that this is correct as desalination is a reverse osmosis process
- It was noted that a filter can be fitted under a sink which similarly allows a reverse osmosis process, and reduces the level of PFAS in water.

Discussion

A comment was made that, at the moment, the only way of keeping PFAS levels down in the blood is by bloodletting.

Q) Can Panel Members be from anywhere [worldwide]?

- Professor Bradley confirmed that this was the case

- The priority was to have the best international expertise available, and it was acknowledged that, at the moment, that expertise isn't necessarily based in the UK
- There was an opportunity for Jersey to become a world leader in research into PFAS and how to address the effects of PFAS.

Q) Who will be fighting in the Council of Ministers for the funding to support Jersey Water with reducing chemical levels and supporting the public health team. Who will be paying for water rates, and for how long, for those impacted?

- The Health Minister acknowledged that she was new to this topic and these discussions
- Ministers were present today because the issue matters
- Ministers will work very hard to support those affected by PFAS, support with their health conditions and access to support (including emotional and psychological support)
- The Health Minister asked those present to raise any issues with her
- The Minister confirmed that this matter was being championed
- The intention was for this to be a partnership moving forward.
- The Environment Minister said that he wanted to know where the problem lies, how big it is and how it is dealt with. He wants to see the levels of PFAS in water as low as it is possible to get them.

Discussion

- A point was made that the existence of PFAS in the water table was related to the presence of microplastics, pesticides and nitrates. There could be a toxic mix.
- Dr du Feu noted that there was an action for cleaner water group, and that all this is linked.

Q) Who can we contact with questions?

- An email address to contact would be provided. [publichealth@gov.je]

Q) Have you considered the impact on flora and fauna and how that will be monitored in the future?

- Dr du Feu confirmed that the impact on potatoes and milk had been assessed, but nothing had been identified
- There would be more to look at as science develops, including (for example) tomato's grown at home and watered with ground water.

Q) Why are some people in the area affected paying water rates, whilst others aren't?

- Dr du Feu agreed to take this away and ask Jersey Water
- Former Deputy Rowland Huelin advised that Ports should be paying the water rates of anyone affected, and these shouldn't be paid by households. Anyone in the plume area should have their rates paid until there is an agreed reduction in the levels of PFAS in borehole water
- The Health Minister also committed to look into this.

Q) Why aren't Jersey Water using desalination water until there is no question about the quality of water being taken?

- Dr du Feu confirmed that, at the moment, well-fields and Pont Marquet were not being used.

Conclusion

- The Health Minister concluded the event and thanked everyone for their attendance
- The Minister said that Government wanted to be pro-active and not reactive on this matter
- There would be a discussion at the Council of Ministers following this meeting so all Ministers could be kept updated.