

Report on	Award Winning Tooth Whitening Awareness Project
Date of Meeting	10 th September 2019
Reporting Officer	Fiona McClements, Head of Environmental Health

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To inform Members about a recent project undertaken by the Environmental Health Service at Mid Ulster District Council in collaboration with the other 10 District Councils, the Department for Economy, and the Trading Standards Service for Northern Ireland, supported by the General Dental Council. The project highlighted the dangers of illegal tooth whitening.
2.0	Background
2.1	Tooth whitening is now one of the most popular cosmetic treatments in the UK with products available widely through retailers online. The practice involves bleaching the teeth using a whitening product usually containing hydrogen peroxide.
2.2	Whilst whitening is perfectly safe if carried out by a registered dental professional, an untrained person could cause permanent damage to teeth and gums. The law is clear that tooth whitening should be carried out within the practice of dentistry. This means that it is a criminal offence for anyone other than a registered dentist, or dental hygienist, dental therapist or clinical dental technician acting to the prescription of a dentist, to offer or provide it. Criminal prosecutions for the illegal practice of dentistry can carry significant fines because of the risk these treatments pose to members of the public.
2.3	One of the most common injuries happens when the mouth-guard containing the bleaching gel (peroxide) does not fit properly and some of it leaks causing painful chemical burns to the mouth, lips, gums and tongue. In extreme cases, it has been reported that people have been sick after swallowing the bleaching product.
2.4	While only dental professionals can provide a tooth whitening service, it is perfectly legal for anyone to treat themselves with an over-the-counter kit, provided it contains less than 0.1% hydrogen peroxide. However, according to the General Dental Council, dentists are trained to know what whitening products will be safe for teeth and gums, whilst products provided by non-dentists often do not have enough safety data and evidence to support their use. This can result in burned gums and or blistered lips or even more serious consequences. The General Dental Council has also indicated that products available to buy online or from high street shops often don't declare the chemicals they contain so they may not be safe to use.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	In addressing the shared concerns of the Environmental Health Departments of the eleven District Councils in NI, the Department for the Economy, and the Trading Standards Service for NI and the General Dental Council, a joint project was undertaken.
3.2	<p>The aims of this project were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support businesses through the provision of information on safe tooth whitening practices; • To protect citizens through the delivery of a consumer education initiative, highlighting the health risks of buying tooth whitening products which are unsafe and/or using unregistered practitioners for treatment
3.3	In October 2018, a focused regulatory and consumer education initiative was developed, to help ensure a consistent approach towards businesses and message for consumers.
3.4	A regulatory guidance circular was produced for businesses, which clearly identified the statutory framework for each of the co-regulators. The purpose of the guidance was to provide all those involved in the provision of tooth whitening products and services in Northern Ireland with the necessary information to encourage and promote compliance and to be clear on their statutory obligations. In February 2019, the guidance was sent to 116 premises in Mid Ulster District Council area (1715 businesses across Northern Ireland).
3.5	The second part of the project involved the production of a video, aimed at the public, highlighting the risks of tooth whitening products and services and advising people to 'protect their smile' by speaking to their dentist before getting their teeth whitened. The video was launched on 6th June 2019 and can be viewed at the link: https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/tooth-whitening .
3.6	This project effectively maximised the use of financial and staff resource available from the three regulatory partners. Social media was used to communicate with the public about the dangers associated with tooth whitening.
3.7	The success of the project was recognised recently at the Regulatory Excellence Awards 2019. The project was announced winner in the Product Safety category. These awards are organised by the Office of Project Safety and Standards (OPSS) and recognise regulatory organisations, individuals, businesses and trade associations that have enhanced protections for consumers by making regulation work for them, while also supporting businesses to comply.
3.8	The Chief Executive for OPSS, Graham Russell, said: "Our judges found the entries to be very diverse in scope and of very high quality. They wanted to recognise the innovation and sheer hard work being done by regulatory teams in an increasingly complex and challenging world."

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: £200 towards overall costs of project
	Human: Officer time
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	That Members note the contribution made by the Environmental Health Service of Mid Ulster District Council in collaboration with other partner organisations to help make this project a success among relevant businesses and members of the public.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	None