



# Health Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 6182 Email [healthcom@parliament.uk](mailto:healthcom@parliament.uk) [www.parliament.uk/healthcom](http://www.parliament.uk/healthcom)

From Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair

Duncan Selbie  
Chief Executive  
Public Health England

*Letter by e-mail to [parliamentary@phe.gov.uk](mailto:parliamentary@phe.gov.uk)*

9 October 2015

Dear Duncan

You will be aware of my correspondence with the Secretary of State concerning the publication of Public Health England's 'Evidence into Action' review of the evidence on reducing sugar consumption.

I am deeply concerned that the Secretary of State does not currently consider it appropriate to publish this key document ahead of the Health Committee's short inquiry into the evidence which should guide policy priorities for addressing childhood obesity. Clearly it would have been best for all concerned if the evidence could have been made available with his support especially as this would have been in line with his expressed views on the importance of timely transparency of data and evidence.

It is my view, however, that the Secretary of State's disinclination either to publish the evidence, or to make it available to the Committee, should not prevent Public Health England from responding positively to our request, which I make through this letter, for you to do so. This would be entirely consistent with the Framework Agreement between PHE and the Department of Health, which states that PHE "shall be free to publish and speak on those issues which relate to the nation's health and wellbeing in order to set out the professional, scientific and objective judgement of the evidence base". I set out in full the relevant paragraphs of the Agreement in an attachment to this letter.

I am making this request because the evidence you have assembled is crucial to the Committee's ability to consider what the policy priorities should be for addressing childhood obesity. Furthermore, it would make available to both the public and the wider health community the essential background to an issue which has rightly generated enormous public concern.

Part of the impetus behind our inquiry is the need for the House to respond to the e-petition on this subject, which has attracted over 140,000 signatures. I do not believe that the petitioners, or the wider public, will understand how the Committee can complete its consideration of this issue if the review of the evidence, paid for with public money and for the benefit of the nation's children, is not made available. At a time when we rightly expect research bodies, clinicians and NHS managers to publish evidence in a full and timely manner, it would send entirely the wrong message for PHE unreasonably to withhold information from a Parliamentary committee.

Whilst I am aware of the government's stated aim of using this evidence to guide its own policy making, it is simply not credible that publication of the evidence could lead to any harm. Sending the wrong message on timely data transparency however, could cause immense damage and call into question the ability and willingness of PHE to act on publication in the public interest independently of the Secretary of State or political considerations.

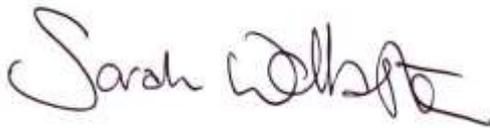
Delayed publication is as harmful as non-publication if this means that the public and health professionals wishing to influence the content of the obesity strategy do not have access to the data before the ink is dry on the obesity strategy..

I also note that a failure to make the evidence available will make it extraordinarily difficult for your colleague Dr Tedstone, who is due to give evidence to us on 20 October, to answer our questions on the subject.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to respond positively to this request, in line with PHE's "freedom to set out the evidence, science, and professional public health advice it presents without fear or favour". If you are not, I will propose to the Committee, at its meeting next Tuesday, that we invite you to come before the committee to explain why. The most likely timing for such a session would be either before or after our hearing with Jamie Oliver, main sponsor of the e-petition to the House which I referred to earlier, which will take place from 4.10 pm on Monday 19 October.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Wollaston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S' and 'W'.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston MP**  
**Chair of the Committee**