

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 21 March 2017

'A' Boards

Item number	7.6
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All

Executive Summary

Edinburgh has had an 'A' board policy in place since the early 2000's. Despite trials and operating enforcement arrangements, the proliferation of street clutter and 'A' boards continues to have an impact on streets, both visual and in terms of moving around.

The Council's priorities to support economic vitality and for creating excellent places are failing to be delivered through policies, guidance and management arrangements for street clutter and in particular in relation to 'A' boards.

A more strategic approach to 'A' boards across the city will help to improve the environment and quality of streets as well as addressing the best management arrangements to ensure delivery and compliance.

Links

Coalition Pledges	P27 , P31 , P40
Council Priorities	CP6 , CP9 , CP12 , CP13
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4

'A' Boards

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Transport and Environment Committee:
 - 1.1.1 notes the analysis carried out to date; and
 - 1.1.2 instructs the Executive Director of Place to prepare a strategy for 'A' boards following appropriate consultation and engagement.

2. Background

- 2.1 Concerns have been raised by organisations including community councils, Living Streets and the Council's Access Panel that street clutter is impeding the ability for pedestrians to move through the city safely, and that the situation is worsening. The trials controlling 'A' boards operating in the city centre are due for review, presenting an opportunity to consider a city wide strategy for the control and management of 'A' boards.
- 2.2 The creation of excellent places and maintaining a quality built environment is central to the policies and strategies promoted by the Council. The Public Realm Strategy, approved in 2009, set out a strategic vision for Edinburgh's public realm; "Edinburgh recognises that the public realm forms an integral part of the public face of the city. Edinburgh will develop and maintain a high quality public realm to complement the outstanding built and natural qualities of this unique capital city".
- 2.3 The Edinburgh Street Design Guidance recognises how important the quality of Edinburgh's streets and public realm is...*'Every street that people live, shop, work and travel along can add to or detract from the quality of city life'*. The guidance includes a series of commitments for improving streets. These commitments are in place to ensure that we consider streets are about places for people, while acknowledging their individual characters, improving condition for pedestrians and using street furniture in a controlled and balanced way.
- 2.4 Edinburgh's economic vitality is also a key priority. Supporting the city centre and the city's business and retail offer in local town centres and villages is critical to Edinburgh's success. Balancing the needs of businesses, residents and visitors within the street environment is challenging especially where areas attract significant numbers of people. Edinburgh supports four Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) that understand the challenges that this brings, however they also

recognise that maintaining a quality of experience, improving accessibility, comfort, cleanliness and safety are key to the success of any centre for business. The priorities for BIDs are often about improving the quality and vibrancy of the public realm and streets.

- 2.5 In particular the proliferation of 'A' boards is considered to be one of the most common features of street clutter and makes it impossible, in some cases, for people to move around the city.
- 2.6 A report was presented to the South Central Neighbourhood Partnership on the [5 September 2016](#) setting out the legislation and guidelines pertaining to the use of 'A' boards in Edinburgh, how the guideline is enforced, the results of previous pilots to ban 'A' boards, and to consider gathering a view on piloting a further ban in the local area. Links to this report, the current 'A' board policy guidance and to a report on 'A' boards to the Executive of the Council in 2006, can all be found in the background papers.

3. Main report

The Issues

- 3.1 An 'A' board is a free standing board advertising the goods and services of a business. They are usually placed outside to attract customers and are used as directional signs to drive customers from nearby locations. Over the last few years Edinburgh has seen the scale, size and number of these boards increase. A survey undertaken by the environmental wardens on the 22 February 2017 noted nearly 200 items in the Royal Mile of which around 60 were 'A' boards. This, despite a ten year ban on 'A' boards in the Royal Mile.
- 3.2 Advertising is controlled through the advertisement regulations, however this generally relates to permanent proposals. The Council provides non- statutory planning guidance on advertising and does not support the use of this type of temporary advertising and directional signage on the pavement and recommends alternatives. Despite this presumption against free standing advertisements on pavements, where they are permitted they must be located to avoid causing a hazard to pedestrians. This information is provided alongside other planning requirements in a [guideline for businesses](#) available on the Council's web site.
- 3.3 Edinburgh has a specific guideline for the siting of 'A' boards which allows boards to be located on the footway temporarily and removed at the end of each day, similar to the way the outdoor tables and chairs operate.
- 3.4 A trial involving a ban on 'A' boards in the Royal Mile and Rose Street resulted in significant improvements to the street scene, but also required additional resources involving both environmental wardens and roads officers. The trial also required officers' time to continue to promote awareness of the arrangements.
- 3.5 BIDs, such as in the West End, New Town, the Grassmarket and Queensferry Ambition can help by galvanising the business community with a collective agenda

that can include the management and appearance of the street scene. Proposals are being considered for an extended BID for the Old Town which could assist the Council in its management obligations.

- 3.6 In the city centre, in particular, there are also safety concerns when 'A' boards are not taken away and left in the streets at night, providing opportunities for antisocial behaviour.
- 3.7 Day-to-day maintenance of the city's streets is also impeded by the siting of additional street furniture.

Other Cities

- 3.8 There are a range of approaches to the management of 'A' boards taken across the country. These include, for instance, a complete ban on 'A' boards in Hackney, the use of a permit or licence system in Stirling, Brighton and Kirklees and the use of a policy with supporting advice and guidance for the siting of 'A' boards in Perth and Kinross, York, Bath and Bristol; similar to those currently applied here in Edinburgh.
- 3.9 Legislation allows the Council to adopt any of these approaches. A key to the success of any of these approaches is clear communication, engaging support and willingness of both the resident and business community to the agreed strategy.

Other models

- 3.10 A helpful parallel might be the way in which trade waste has been addressed. Collection of trade waste has been a problem in Edinburgh's streets, adding to clutter and affecting the pedestrian environment. New operational arrangements for trade waste have been in place for over a year and are recognised as a successful model. Importantly, the new presentation and collection arrangements have been underpinned with a clear and co-ordinated enforcement strategy and a very thorough communications plan.

Solutions and Opportunities

- 3.11 The Edinburgh Street Design Guidance sets out to reduce street clutter and improve the pedestrian environment. 'A' boards contribute significantly to clutter on a day-to-day basis on our streets. Reducing, controlling or removing 'A' boards is essential if the Council is going to apply its own guidance.
- 3.12 Recommended options include:
- a total ban;
 - partial ban - restrictions in defined areas of the city or key streets;
 - revised guidelines; or
 - permit or licence arrangements.
- 3.13 The management and enforcement for all of these options will vary, however they will all require specific resources to address compliance with the preferred policy.

- 3.14 With any of these options it will be important to provide supporting measures for businesses. These measures might include improvements to shop fronts, lighting, city dressing along with features such as awnings, hanging signs and building mounted signs that can contribute to the street scene in a complementary way. The new development in Advocates Close, for example, has introduced coordinated business signage on the closes and vennels that provides the much needed directional signage, but avoids a proliferation of 'A' boards. In Rose Street, business directories have been introduced along with street scene improvements and de-cluttering measures that help to improve the image of the street and provide the way finding information visitors and businesses need.
- 3.15 A review of 'A' board policy and agreeing a preferred approach must be done in the context of the objective of current policies to protect, improve and enhance the street environment. It should include discussions with interest groups, such as Living Streets as well as the business community and retailers to develop a solution that can be supported.
- 3.16 Any new strategy for 'A' boards should also be supported by a clear communications strategy. The trade waste project was planned with a long lead in programme, a 'bedding in' period with a supporting and clear enforcement process.

Timeline

- 3.17 It is proposed to undertake a review over the summer of 2017, which will provide the remit for the strategy, consult with the community, businesses and interest groups in the autumn, and report the final strategy to committee in January 2018.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 Addressing the arrangements and controls around 'A' boards will result in opportunities to deliver Council priorities for economic vitality and excellent places by:
- Improved and clearly communicated guidance;
 - improving the qualities of the public realm and townscape of the city;
 - improving the pedestrian environment by reducing clutter and eliminating conflicts;
 - improving management arrangements for the street and public realm; and
 - working with the business and retail communities to deliver complementary initiatives as alternatives to 'A' boards.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The resources required to support a review and consultation exercise for a strategy for 'A' boards will have to be met from existing budgets. Subsequent management and enforcement measures would need to be reviewed as an integral part of the

strategy, looking perhaps at a similar approach adopted for the Trade Waste project, and the costs met from existing budgets.

- 5.2 There are opportunities to seek funding from Scottish Government grants through Transport Scotland's Paths for All budgets, which prioritise measures for improvements to walking environments.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 The current guidance and enforcement arrangements are failing to deliver the Council's policies on street and public realm design and management.
- 6.2 Reviewing the strategy for 'A' boards and developing a solution that best reflects the needs and ambitions of the residents and business communities would help to remove the risks resulting from failing to deliver council policy.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 Positive improvements will result from developing a strategy on the delivery of the Council's priorities for economic vitality and excellent places.
- 7.2 Improvements in the operation and management of streets will have a positive impact on all ages and especially for people with disabilities.
- 7.3 There will be potential improvements in the quality and performance of maintenance operations; improvements in quality and reductions in maintenance liability; reductions in wear and tear of the street asset; improvements in amenity with a reduction in complaints and an improved pedestrian environment with more walkable streets.
- 7.4 If no action is taken, infringements to all ages will continue from the effects of not being able to navigate streets unimpeded.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 The impacts in relation to the elements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 Public Bodies Duties have been considered below:
 - The proposals in this report will help achieve a sustainable Edinburgh as improvements in public realm are recognised as being key to economic wellbeing;
 - The proposals in this report will assist in improving social justice by improving public space and access for all.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 The Council has sought public opinion through a variety of organisations, including the Neighbourhood Partnerships and Transport Forum, led by the Council. Issues relating to 'A' boards have been raised consistently since a report presented to the then Council's Executive in 2006. The issue has been highlighted more recently by the Southside Community Council and Living Streets.
- 9.2 Further consultation and engagement will be required with a range of groups and organisations in order to develop an 'A' board strategy that best reflects the needs and requirements for Edinburgh's streets, retail and tourism industries.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [The Control of Advertising Boards \(A- Boards\) and Similar Structures- Results of Trial, 23 May 2006, Executive of the Council](#)
- 10.2 [Advertising- Boards \(A-Boards\), 5 September 2016, South Central Neighbourhood Partnership](#)
- 10.3 [City of Edinburgh Council Policy Guideline, A- Boards on Public Footways](#)

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11. Links

Coalition pledges	P27 - Seek to work in full partnership with Council staff and their representatives P31 - Maintain our city's reputation as the cultural capital of the world by continuing to support and invest in our cultural infrastructure P40 - Work with Edinburgh World Heritage Trust and other stakeholders to conserve the city's built heritage
Council outcomes	CP6 - A creative, cultural capital CP9 - An attractive city CP12 - A built environment to match our ambition CP13 - Transformation, Workforce, Citizen and partner engagement, Budget
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4 - Edinburgh's communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric
Appendices	None