

BREIFING NOTE

Pending Review of A-boards Policy – Claire McHarrie, Project Administrator, Street Works Team.

20/08/2018

Introduction

The current policy for the use of A-boards in Shropshire is under review on the Shropshire council website and has been since 2016. There have been recent requests from the public on the progress of the review and we feel now is the time to complete an update of the current policy with the collaboration of internal and external stakeholders to produce a policy that will take into consideration all of those effected.

Background

Some traders consider the use of A-boards essential to the operation and success of their business, however others see them as street clutter or potential health and safety hazards to the general public especially to those who have visual or mobility impairments, or young children in pushchairs. The current policy was created and agreed by cabinet in 2011 with the aim to support local businesses and to uphold the right of the public's use of the highways.

Current Policy (stated as under review - <http://shropshire.gov.uk/street-care-and-cleaning/a-boards/>)

This policy allows businesses the use of up to two A-boards (including any advanced boards with permission from town or parish councils) in which to advertise their particular trade or business.

The A-board is to be placed directly outside of the premises against the frontage of the property. It must be fit for purpose and cause no potential hazard, nuisance or obstruction and the business needs to demonstrate that sufficient public liability insurance (£5m) is in place to protect the council. Any special or additional conditions will be at the discretion of the Streetworks Manager (a position no longer held in the Authority).

Shropshire council retain the right to move, remove and enforce the policy criteria to ensure safe passage on the county's highways which fall within the remits of the Highways Act 1980 and the Town & Country Planning Act 1992 undertaken by Environmental maintenance teams as part of their current duties.

Public feedback

There has been contact made and concerns raised by members of the public regarding the timescale of the review process which needs to account for the previous excessive use of A-boards in town centres balanced along retail outlets wishing to promote their business.

A Mr Richardson has been requesting a review of A-board practices since 2015 and has been awaiting a finalised policy document. Mr Richardson would also like to know the level of involvement in the development of the policy by organisations who deal with those with visibility and mobility difficulties and quotes the Equality Act 2010 in requesting the complete ban of A-boards across the county as practiced by other councils such as York City, Edinburgh and Bradford.

Potential Policy and Enforcement amendments/considerations

Suggestions have been made to consider the restriction of A-boards to one per premises and to encourage the use of hanging boards. There could be an initiative (encouraged by traders groups) whereby businesses in alleys or shuts could be signposted by one board signposting all.

The process of an application for a licence would ensure each A-board is registered with a 28 day notice period for which objections can be raised by the public before the issue of the licence.

The strict regulation of A-board dimensions to be set within the policy to elude interpretations of general size tolerances and times specified for hours permitted of A-board display on the highway (e.g. business opening hours but not between 9pm and 6am).

Liverpool City Council currently follow these practices and advise licence applicants of all criteria and conditions during the application process. A granted licence is valid for 12 months and will require a renewal application after this period

(<https://liverpool.gov.uk/business/licences-and-permits/roads-and-highway/licences/advertising-board-licence/>).

Currently a “light touch” enforcement is prescribed by central Highways Technicians, however it is felt that CEO’s and Public Protection would be better placed to manage this service along with their current pavement permits scheme, creating a clear direction for all concerned and for the revised policy to be written with the involvement of local equality and traders groups with a consultation period for other internal and external groups to comment.

Suggested Actions

Gain approval from portfolio holder to review the current A-board policy and enforcement methods.

With the collaboration of interested internal groups review current policy and develop a best practice strategy for the consultation of selected internal and external groups, including equality and traders organisations.

Investigate potential transfer of A-board process from highways to public protection.

Present updated policy and process for consideration at cabinet.