

Statement: CS15.02

Cabinet – 9 March 2021

Re: Agenda item 15 - Advertising and Sponsorship Policy

Statement submitted by: Cllr Carla Denyer

Thank you for bringing forward this policy – it is great to see the Council adopting these rules, which will stop adverts on Council property from undermining some of the aims of its own policies on public health.

Particular thanks to the officers for consulting the scrutiny committee at an early stage in its development so that councillors could give meaningful input. I think this has resulted in a stronger policy that hopefully everyone can get behind.

However, I would really like the Council to go further. In particular:

- To include a ban on ads for high carbon products and services (Flights, fossil fuels, the most polluting cars, maybe meat and other environmentally damaging products? I know the criteria for high carbon needs to be well defined) in a future version of this policy;
- To adopt similar policies in Planning, so that these rules apply to all corporate outdoor advertising in Bristol, not just ones on Council property.

I note from the report that neither of these have been ruled out, which is promising.

So I just encourage progress on these to be speedy, and would like to offer my help if there's anything I can do to support these.

Another thing I want to draw the Cabinet's attention to is the currently poor regulation of the advertising industry. The report says:

"The Policy operates within a wide range of existing legislative requirements and codes of conduct, including the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)..." etc.

It's true that the range is wide, but unfortunately largely ineffective. The ASA is meant to be the public's means of redress but this self-regulatory body (run by and for the advertising industry) has been criticised as weak and ineffective by several organisations. There's a report by Adfree Cities summarising the issues, here <http://adfreecities.org.uk/asa>. (I was one of the contributors to this report.)

The ASA's lack of 'teeth' and low rate of investigated and upheld complaints means that national government and local councils cannot defer all of public grievances to the ASA alone. Indeed this partly explains one of the reasons that Council's planning committees see so many objections to planning applications for new digital screens, and why people are pushing for a stronger Advertising Policy. So this is just a note of caution not to assume that the ASA has all the issues with advertising 'covered', and to reinforce the importance of the Council having its own strong policies until national regulation catches up.

Obviously there is a need to take the public with us on this, but attitudes are changing fast and I think you might be quite surprised by how much support there is for strong action on harmful adverts.

Thanks for reading and I look forward to supporting future progress on regulation of advertising.