

Model Ethical & Low Carbon Advertising Policy motion

Adfree Cities, January 2023

The following text could form the basis of motions to Council meetings. The text will need to be adapted to reflect local scenarios.

This Council notes:

- That it is possible for local authorities to implement advertising policies against specific products if they consider them to be harmful to the amenity of an area. The Greater London Authority (GLA), which controls Transport for London (TfL) property, enacted a Healthier Food Advertising Policy in 2018 prohibiting High Fat, Sugar or Salt (HFSS) food advertising on TfL property. Council planning departments will be able to advise on how to restrict the use of 'deemed consent' under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 including writing to the relevant Secretary of State.
- That advertising prohibitions and restrictions already exist regarding all tobacco products and e-cigarettes, guns and offensive weapons, breath testing and products designed to mask the effects of alcohol, 'pyramid schemes', prostitution services, 'obscene material' as well as other rules regarding marketing to children, HFSS products, medical and health claims, religion, financial products, and pornography.¹
- That the continued paid promotion of activities or products that are potentially harmful to mental or physical health or the environment, such as junk food, gambling, alcohol or high carbon products (including cars, fossil fuel companies and airlines and airports), are very common across a variety of out of home advertising media.
- That statistical evidence shows how exposure to advertising increases consumption of advertised goods and services. A 2021 study found that exposure to SUV advertising can make someone 250% more likely to own an SUV than no vehicle at all.² A ban on advertising for unhealthy food across the Transport for London network resulted in a drop in household purchases of

¹ <https://www.badverts.org/case-studies>

²

http://www.badverts.org/s/Advertising-and-demand-for-SUVs_Kasser-et-alBadvertising-2021.pdf

unhealthy food and drink, preventing 100,000 obesity cases with an expected saving to the NHS of £200 million.³

- That _____ Council currently holds an Advertising Concession Agreement with ___[insert company]_____ involving the upkeep and maintenance of over ___[insert number]___ bus stops across the city many of which include advertising panels and ___[insert number]___ advertising billboard sites.
- That a double-sided digital bus stop advertising screen uses four times the electricity of the average British home and a single '48 sheet' digital billboard may use as much energy as 37 UK homes⁴. In addition, there is the energy used in the manufacturing and distribution of ad infrastructure and printed materials.^{4,5} There is also the energy needed to supply and use the products and services that ads encourage.
- That extra emissions resulting from advertising products at the national level is calculated to have added 208 million tonnes of CO2e in 2022, an increase of 11% since 2019.⁶
- That a climate emergency was declared by this council on [date], which included a commitment to reduce citywide carbon emissions to _____ by _____. [Delete if not applicable]
- Other councils, including Bristol, Cambridgeshire, Norwich and Liverpool, have developed more ethical advertising policies.
- That banning advertising for certain products is not the same as banning the products themselves.

Full Council believes:

- That the very purpose of advertising is to stimulate demand for goods and services.
- That some advertising content undermines the council's objectives regarding public health, air pollution and sustainable consumption. For example: HFSS products undermine health objectives, petrol and diesel car adverts (especially

3

<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2022/junk-food-advertising-restrictions-prevent-almost-100000-obesity-cases-and>

4

<https://adfreecities.org.uk/2022/12/the-electricity-costs-of-digital-out-of-home-advertising-screens/>

⁵ <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/the-environmental-impacts-of-corporate-advertising>

⁶ <https://www.purposedisruptors.org/advertised-emissions>

for Sports Utility Vehicles) undermine air quality objectives, and airline advertising undermines carbon emission targets.

Full Council resolves:

- To review its Advertising Concession Agreement[s] immediately, to investigate the possibility of amending the current set of prohibitions and restrictions during the term of the agreement to include products that contribute to climate change and air pollution and public health issues: including alcohol, gambling, 'high carbon' (with a definition of what constitutes high carbon), products, and HFSS products.
- If the above is not possible, to begin work on a new policy, to take effect when the Advertising Concession Agreement is next renewed.
- To implement an Ethical Advertising Policy as part of the council's planning policies, to apply to bus stops, billboards and advertising spaces in the city within the jurisdiction of the local planning area. This policy would then be used to set targets, expectations or restrictions on all advertising in the city that interacts with the Council's objectives on public health, air pollution, climate change and sustainable consumption and to ascertain which companies and products the council wishes to associate itself with and support, including local businesses, and ban harmful products, companies or services from being advertised on council owned land, in our communications, or from sponsoring council organised events.
- To adopt a presumption against planning applications for all new digital advertising screens in the city due to the high electricity use of these technologies.
- Write to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, asking for a ban on such forms of unethical advertising nationally.
- Write to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities asking for reforms to Planning Guidance on outdoor advertising to take into account the unique problems with energy-intensive digital billboards.