

**BRIEFING NOTE FOR TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS**

Review of A-boards Policy & Process – Gary Parton, Traffic Manager, Street Works Team.  
18/04/2019

**Issue**

The placement of ‘A’ boards on the highway / footway can sometimes be a contentious and emotive issue. For local retailers they can be seen as a highly effective and necessary method of promoting their business. For others, such as people with visual or mobility impairments, they can be seen as a hazard and for the local Authority there are related legislative, environmental, business development and safety issues to consider and uphold.

Consistent calls for further consideration / consultation of and with a further review to the existing Policy combined with a lack of current internal resource / cohesive enforcement process led to the issue being tabled at a meeting of Shropshire Council’s “Place Overview Committee” in December 2018.

Following the recommendation from that meeting there is now an opportunity to engage with all Town and Parish Councils to gain views and advice on a practical, effective and agreed way forward on forming both an effective revised policy and process for local management of advertising boards on the highway which fully takes into consideration all of those affected.

**Background**

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

The current policy for the use of ‘A’ boards in Shropshire was agreed by Cabinet in 2011 following a similar review which took place in 2010 with the aim to support local businesses and uphold the right of public use of the highway.

Due mainly to organisational re-structures (leading to key positions in the process being made redundant) the current policy has effectively been “under review” since 2016.

The current 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.

Currently there are no administration / enforcement fees involved and a “light touch” approach to any necessary enforcement by Environmental Maintenance teams with retailers asked to move/remove boards which are deemed as causing an obstruction.

There has been correspondence and concerns raised by members of the public, and those representing disability groups, regarding the timescale of the review process and a request to fully consult and involve disability groups in any review.

## **Considerations**

Suggestions have been made to consider the restriction of 'A' boards to only one per premises and to encourage new initiatives to avoid unnecessary proliferation and clutter – such as hanging boards or multiple businesses having one board/bespoke sign to signpost all (particularly in regard to businesses located in alleys or shuts)

In addition there have been suggestions of introducing a standard size/dimension of board and permitted times for display. Other suggestions have advocated a complete ban of 'A' boards across the county as practiced by other councils such as York City, Edinburgh and Bradford.

A review of official complaints received indicated that six complaints were received last year in relation to 'A' board placement however it was noted that while most (a conservative estimation is that there are around 1,000 'A' boards situated in market towns alone across Shropshire) do not present a risk to highway users, a proliferation or un-wisely placed boards can be a hazard for people with visual impairment or mobility issues.

It was also recognised that they are a valuable tool for traders to ensure effective promotion and advertisement of their business.

Taking account of these and other options the "Place Overview Committee" advocated an initial engagement process be carried out with a view to gaining Town and Parish Council views and feedback on the issues outlined whilst also engaging with other affected stakeholders such as relevant trade associations

Furthermore there was a desire, as a result of engagement, to draw up clearer guidance that will be clear and enable retailers to comply while continuing to advertise their business.

There was also agreement that any subsequent guidelines should not be overly bureaucratic and that, as an Authority with limited and diminishing resources and increasing statutory and safeguarding responsibilities, there should be an enquiry as to the appetite and willingness of Town and Parish Councils for deciding the "day to day" management of 'A' boards locally with responsibility for process and policing/enforcement devolved.

This would be with Shropshire Council providing the overall parameters and appropriate statutory guidelines.

## **Conclusion.**

The current position is that views and feedback are being sought from all affected/interested parties in the form of an initial response to this engagement and taking into account the issues, consideration and background supplied.

The deadline for responses to be received and considered is 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019 and the address for responses is: [aboardreview@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:aboardreview@shropshire.gov.uk)

During this period I am happy to discuss further or engage to suit at planned council meetings where this issue can be tabled.

## **Recommendation**

That engagement takes place on the basis of views being sought both on "best practice" in regard to any amended policy/process for 'A' boards and on the draft recommendation of devolvement of process and enforcement to relevant Town and Parish Councils. This information will form a subsequent report to be considered at the "Place Overview Committee" for a recommendation to Cabinet.