

Council bans election posters

✘ The City of Edinburgh Council have followed in the footsteps of their Glaswegian counterparts, implementing a city-wide ban on all election posters.

The motion was brought forward by Tory Councillor Gordon Buchan, who regards the campaigning technique as a, “great expense and great waste”.

The original motion read as follows:-“Council:

- i) notes that several weeks following the Scottish Parliament elections, there are still election posters for candidates of all parties on street furniture;
- ii) resolves to ban election posters for all future elections as they are considered wasteful, not environmentally friendly and no longer relevant in promoting elections.”

Buchan dismissed arguments that the posters were informative to voters, and maintained that it is an insult to the intelligence of the public to assume that they rely on the posters to tell them when to vote, and who to vote for.

Buchan also suggested that a ban on the pinning of posters on lamp-posts and other “street furniture”, would force the candidates to engage on a more personal level with the electorate. Labour Councillor Eric Milligan suggested the ban would simply introduce something illegal for the sake of it.

The motion was carried despite opposition from Green and Labour members.

Councillor Eric Milligan, opined that the ban could be “terribly damaging” to smaller parties who might not be able to afford other campaigning techniques, and it might put them at a disadvantage. Councillor Alison Johnstone wound up her argument against adopting the motion by suggesting that perhaps the Conservative party members were, “too posh to

poster”.

Buchan dismissed the Green party’s arguments, pointing out that Glasgow still elected a Green MP in the last elections, despite not being able to utilise this particular campaigning method.

Public opinion appears to be in consonance with Buchan’s, with 76% of Edinburgh Evening News pollsters viewing the ban as a laudable notion.

The amendment has also found praise from environmental groups around the country. We spoke to Carol Noble, PR officer for ‘Keep Scotland Beautiful’, who explained:-

“Of course if the posters are up for their allotted time and removed quickly, that’s fine. However, all too often they linger in the streets, so in view of this we see the motion as a thoroughly positive step.”

Councillor Eric Milligan caused some mirth in the chamber by suggesting that it was simply that Councillor Buchan did not want posters himself as they would have to say:-“Vote Buchan Conservative”. We shall leave you to work that one out!

Aside from that the council meeting was over by lunchtime. One matter of some importance (and lengthy debate) which was discussed at the meeting was whether the council would continue with investigating a different way of working by looking at Alternative Business Models. The background to this is explained in the agenda thus:-“On 17 December 2009, the Council instructed the Chief Executive to explore the potential to create three Strategic Partnerships or Joint Ventures for Corporate & Transactional Services, Integrated Facilities Management and Environmental Services through the Competitive Dialogue process.”

Essentially this means that some council functions might be outsourced, or simply carried out by different organisations

if it proves more efficient in terms of savings and performance to do so.

Councillor Wheeler in proposing the motion said that he wants a 'robust evaluation process'. The investigation stage requires another £2m of funding to go forward and this was approved by 40 votes to 17. Labour Group Leader Councillor Andrew Burns commented that the approval of the funds was not 'the best use of public money". He also suggested that this was a bit premature as the two departments of Corporate Services and Finance may well be amalgamated anyway. The full business case will be produced for the August council meeting.

The council meeting at the end of this month will discuss the tram project, although Councillor Dawe admitted that, despite the requirement in the minutes of the special meeting held on 16 May meeting it might yet prove difficult to have all paperwork in place a week before the 30 June meeting. She expressed the hope that it will be, and also of course that the meeting decides in favour of continuing the trams. There was some discussion over how the figures for a potential abandonment of the project would be calculated. The SNP group demanded that the figures are not inflated by addition of the cost of demolishing various bits of the tram project which might no longer be needed.

We live tweeted during the meeting, which was otherwise poorly attended by members of the press, and hope some of you found that useful. Maybe you could let us know?