

Advertising mistakes known about for months before councillors alerted

Mistakes in the statutory advertising of Edinburgh's active travel plans by a contractor put to the public for feedback were discovered more than three months before city councillors were alerted.

In April the council revealed that "errors" had been made in a consultation on making Spaces for People schemes permanent. The errors meant the consultation had to begin again, at a cost of nearly £20,000.

A Freedom of Information request has revealed that transport officers had known about the blunder since the start of the year.

The officers pinned the blame for the problems on external contractors – and said withholding the information for 15 weeks was necessary to undertake a "detailed review" of all plans.

But a senior councillor said there were "very serious questions" to be answered in light of the "deeply concerning" revelations.

Transport Convener Cllr Scott Arthur – who was also kept in

the dark until April – said time was needed to consider “how best to proceed to address the errors”.

The consultation was launched in November seeking residents’ opinions on the Spaces for People measures rolled-out during the pandemic, to help the council determine which of these should remain in place permanently.

The scheme – which the council has since re-branded Travelling Safely – involved installing segregated cycle lanes in the city and closing some roads to traffic. The council said the aim was to “improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists”.

Although positively received in some areas, the changes have not been universally popular and have proved controversial with the local authority accused of not listening to residents’ views.

On 26 April, just a few weeks before the consultation was due to be completed, the council’s active travel team emailed councillors to notify them “some minor errors” had been identified in the traffic orders advertised to the public, including inaccurate information on bus lanes and yellow lines.

This meant the entire process had to be re-started, extending it by another six months and costing £19,425. The council said this sum will be claimed back from the consultants responsible for the errors.

However a Freedom of Information request by the Local Democracy Reporting Service found that senior transport officers were aware of the inaccuracies as early as 10 January – more than three months before elected members were briefed about the mistake.

Liberal Democrat group leader on Edinburgh Council, Cllr Kevin Lang, said: “I think there are very serious questions as to why it was that errors in the traffic orders were not

highlighted to councillors until months after officers first became aware."

Lang said the process had been "a troubled one from the very start".

He said: "Given all the concern and all the frustration from residents who felt that the council was not listening on these projects, it is deeply concerning that such important information was not brought to the attention of councillors at an earlier stage.

"I expect officers to always be open and transparent with elected members but on what has been such a troubled project for three years now, I think it's all the more concerning that errors in process were not brought to elected members' attention at an earlier stage."

Cllr Arthur said: "After some errors and discrepancies were initially discovered within the Travelling Safely scheme ETR0 documentation produced by external consultants, officers carried out a detailed review of all of the documentation for each of the five ETR0s to identify any further errors.

"Consideration then had to be given as to how best to proceed to address the errors, prior to briefing elected members.

"I was formally notified of the problem on the 21st of April, but was made aware there was an issue during the preceding week."

Transport spokesperson for the SNP group Cllr Danny Aston questioned why it took almost three months for Cllr Arthur to find out about the mistakes.

He said: "It's dreadful that he didn't know about this and then rolled over to his Tory and Lib Dem allies when it came to light. Who's really running this council?"



Spaces for People measures on Waverley Bridge