

Adverts for high carbon products could continue on bus shelters despite council ban

Adverts for cars, cruise holidays and other “high carbon products” could continue to appear on bus shelters across Edinburgh until 2030 despite a ban by the council.

Last week city councillors voted overwhelmingly to crackdown on promoting companies linked to the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels, in a move that could cost the local authority £200,000 a year in revenue.

As a result airlines, airports, oil giants and car manufacturers – including electric sports utility vehicles (SUVs) – will be prohibited from purchasing advertising on council-owned spaces and other assets.

However such firms will continue to be able to buy-up billboards at bus and tram stops for another six years, it has emerged, as the council’s advertising and street furniture contract is not due to come to an end until 2030.

Councillors approved a seven-year extension to the deal with JC Decaux in January 2023, which led to calls for radical changes to the authority’s position on advertising, which was eventually backed by 15 votes to 2 at last Tuesday’s policy and sustainability committee.

Details of the deal had not been made public due to commercial sensitivity, however a report before councillors last week said the impact of the new restrictions “could result in reduction of £200,000 per annum in revenue from 2030 onwards”.

Council leader Cammy Day said: “We fully support well-managed advertising and sponsorship arrangements, so I welcome this revision of our policy in line with our net zero ambitions.

“The new policy won’t impact existing contracts and will only apply to new contracts at the point of re-tender.”

The advert ban on fossil fuels was pushed for by the City Chambers’ Green Group, who successfully tabled an amendment for it to apply to weapons manufacturers as well. However councillors stopped short of including meat products as officials warned this would be “highly controversial”.

The council said the promotion of “high-carbon products” was “incompatible” with the its goal to reach net zero by 2030.

“Reaching this target requires a shift in society’s perception of success, and the advertising industry has a key role to play in promoting low-carbon behaviours,” a report said.

Greens councillor Alys Mumford said: “As a council we believe in climate justice, we believe in emissions reduction and we believe in making Edinburgh a better place to live and work.

“We know that climate anxiety is very real and having a massive impact on the mental health of our young people. This is about what we say about ourselves as a council and as a city.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter