

Wednesday 7 February 2024

FEEDBACK FROM THE GREENER FUTURES REFERENCE GROUP ON A REFERRAL FROM COUNCIL – MOTION ON ADVERTISING & SPONSORSHIP POLICY

Purpose of report: To update Members of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee on the outcome of consideration by the Greener Futures Reference Group of the Original Motion regarding Advertising and Sponsorship policy submitted to the meeting of the County Council on 11 October 2022.

Introduction:

1. Jonathan Essex submitted a motion to a meeting of the County Council held on 11 October 2022 on the topic of advertising and sponsorship policy. It was resolved that this Motion be referred to the Greener Futures Reference Group for consideration.
2. This report provides a summary of the conclusions of the GFRG following their consideration of the Motion and of the briefing and recommendations provided by officers (Appendix 1). It invites the Select Committee to note:
 - a) that the GFRG did not endorse the recommendation of Officers.
 - b) That the GFRG recommends that the Motion be referred to Cabinet for further consideration and debate.

Background.

3. The existing Advertising and Sponsorship policy was developed and endorsed by Cabinet in 2019. This was following identification of advertising on highways as a possible revenue stream. A number of advertising projects on Surrey County Council (SCC) infrastructure were developed large scale digital advertising sites. The Council is currently out to tender for a County-wide small format package with award due in March 2024. This is worth approximately £500k per annum and a total of c. £5 million over the 10-year term of contract.

4. Future changes to the existing Advertising and Sponsorship policy are delegated to the Head of Highways & Transport in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Highways.
5. The Motion asked Council to amend its Advertising and Sponsorship Policy to ban advertisements specifically for fossil fuel companies, flights, petrol and diesel vehicles, and other as yet unidentified high carbon products. It also asked Council to promote adoption of the revised Advertising and Sponsorship Policy by other partners committed to Surrey's Climate Change Strategy. The Full text of the motion is the Annex 2.
6. The motion was referred to the GFRG on 11 October 2022 and considered formally at the GFRG on 8 March 20223 and subsequently on 30 November 2023.

KEY ACTIVITIES AND ANALYSIS:

7. Following the referral:

- the GFRG had an initial discussion on the topic on 8 March 2023. Background information relevant to the motion was provided to members of the group. There was insufficient time to fully consider the issue.
- a service briefing report on the Motion was requested and officers invited to address the points made and make recommendations as to whether they should be endorsed. This was circulated to the Group on 28 November 2023 for discussion at the 30 November GFRG.

8. On 30 November 2023, the GFRG held a further discussion on the item, inviting contributions from both the proposer of the Motion and from service representatives. Officers talked members through their considerations and proposed responses to the Motion. In the course of discussion, the following key points emerged:

- I. Officers were concerned about the commercial implications and viability of any change to the existing policy and argued that imposing restrictions would make any potential contracts unfavourable to the markets.
- II. An alternative was to utilise the income gained from advertising (c.£0.5m pa) to progress and implement projects to improve or expediate the attainment of Greener Futures objectives.
- III. The GFRG was concerned that the assessment was unduly negative and did not take account of any benefits that a change in approach could bring. The focus was on commercial costs and concerns and not on the opportunities presented in discouraging consumption of high carbon products and /or seeking to advertise instead green or neutral carbon products and services.

- IV. The GFRG felt strongly that having declared a Climate emergency and committed to a NetZero target for Surrey by 2050, Surrey County Council should show more leadership, even if detrimental to revenue in the short to medium term. And that it was not acceptable to be enabling advertising for commercial benefit by companies or products in direct opposition to the Council's net zero goals and aims.
- V. The primary interest of the GFRG was by definition, to protect greener futures interest and as such the group could not support the recommendation that no change be made to the advertising and sponsorship policy.

Conclusions:

9. Based on the above concerns members were not able to endorse the recommendation that the policy remain in its current form and no steps taken to ban fossil fuel related and high carbon products. Conversely, the Greener Futures Reference Group noted their support for the Motion and suggested that it be looked at further by Cabinet Members, including the Cabinet Member for Environment and the Cabinet Member for Highways (with responsibility for the current advertising and sponsorship policy) to ensure that environmental as well as commercial concerns are taken into account.

Greener Future Reference Group Recommends

10. The Greener Futures Reference Group recommends that the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee notes that:
 - a) the GFRG did not endorse the recommendation of Officers.
 - b) the GFRG recommends that the Motion be referred to Cabinet for further consideration and debate.

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Sources/background papers

[Choose agenda document pack - Council 11 October 2022 - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

Annexes:

Appendix 1 – Highways Service Briefing on Advertising & Sponsorship policy Motion (to be circulated separately)

Appendix 2 – Original Motion

ORIGINAL MOTION – ADVERTISING & SPONSORSHIP POLICY

Item 9 (iv)

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Cabinet Member for Environment, Marisa Heath, moved a proposal. The proposal was as follows:

That the motion below by Jonathan Essex be referred to the Greener Futures Reference Group - a Task Group of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee - for consideration.

This Council notes that:

- Advertising is successful in encouraging demand for the products advertised. For example, research by Purpose Disruptors showed that the UK advertising sector, through increased product sales had the impact of increasing UK carbon emissions by 28% (186 MtCO₂) in 2019. Similarly, research by the New Weather Institute indicates that the carbon emissions resulting from the increased demand, for cars in the EU, generated by advertising, are more than Belgium's total greenhouse gas emissions.
- The [2022](#) Climate Mitigation Report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlighted the potential for behaviour change to support carbon emission reductions. It lists regulation of advertising as an example of a policy measure that can have a "*major influence on mitigative capacity*".
- In an Attitudes to Advertising poll in the UK by Opinium Research in 2022 of 2000 people, 68% of UK adults said they would support restrictions on advertising of environmentally harmful products.
- Advertising prohibitions and restrictions already exist; these include prohibition on advertising all tobacco products and e-cigarettes, guns and offensive weapons, 'obscene material'. Rules also affect marketing aimed at children; high fat sugar and salt products; medical and health claims.

This Council believes that:

- Banning advertising does not ban the products themselves; people are still free to buy the products.
- Surrey County Council has committed to work in partnership to reduce carbon emissions across Surrey. A baseline report by Surrey University on behalf of the Surrey Climate Commission showed the extent of scope 3 emissions (in what we buy and import from outside of Surrey). One area where these can be reduced in Surrey is through the impact of advertising in public spaces.

- Some advertising content undermines the Council's objectives. For example, petrol and diesel car adverts, especially for Sports Utility Vehicles, undermine air quality objectives. Airline advertising undermines carbon emission targets.

This Council resolves to call upon the Cabinet:

- I. To amend its Advertising and Sponsorship Policy to ban advertisements specifically for fossil fuel companies, flights, petrol and diesel vehicles, and wording the amendment to ban other as yet unidentified high carbon products.
- II. To implement this revised Advertising and Sponsorship Policy internally and wherever possible promote its adoption by other partners committed to Surrey's Climate Change Strategy. This should include restricting advertising of high carbon products on bus stops, billboards and advertising spaces, plus all publications by Surrey County Council.

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