

P-05-898 Ban the use of A boards in Wales, Correspondence – RNIB Cymru to Chair, 14.11.19

R N I B

Cymru

**Golwg gwahanol
See differently**

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Date: 14 November 2019

Dear Janet,

Many thanks for the opportunity to feed in to the Petitions Committee's discussion on Petition P-05-898 Ban the use of A-boards in Wales.

1. About RNIB Cymru

1.1 RNIB Cymru is Wales' largest sight loss charity. We provide support, advice and information to people living with sight loss across Wales. We also campaign for improvements to services and raise awareness of the issues facing blind and partially sighted people. We support, empower and involve thousands of people affected by sight loss to improve lives and challenge inequalities.

We want to lead the creation of a **Wales where there are no barriers for people with sight loss.**

1.2 We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee's consideration of this petition. There are currently 111,000 people in Wales living with sight loss.

From difficulty accessing treatment and services, to a lack of emotional and practical support, blind and partially sighted people each face their own set of challenges every day. Feelings of isolation are unacceptably high, and only one in four blind or partially sighted people of working age has a job.

We know the numbers will increase dramatically. By 2050, the number of people with sight loss is expected to double. 13 people a day are losing their sight in Wales.¹

1.3 This submission emphasises the experiences of blind and partially sighted people of navigating streets littered with A-boards and also draws attention to developments in Scotland which will be of relevance to this committee's discussions.

2. About A-boards

2.1 "A-boards" are defined as a frame supporting an advertising hoarding for the purposes of displaying information to passing sighted pedestrians at pavement level.

2.2 All pavement obstructions have adverse effects on blind and partially sighted people because they make getting around harder. The more difficult it is to get around, the less freedom and opportunity people have to participate in their local community.

Advertising boards are in general use across the country. They physically obstruct the pavement and prevent pedestrians from being able to use the entire pavement. They present a trip hazard, especially to people who cannot see them and who use mobility aids.

The temporary and mobile nature of these boards means that blind and partially sighted people cannot learn where they are, so struggle to avoid walking into them. We know that collisions with advertising boards often result in injuries such as cuts and grazes. The "homemade" nature

¹ *Every day 250 people in the UK start to lose their sight [Reference: Deloitte Access Economics (2018), Incidence and risk of sight loss and blindness in the UK. RNIB]

of some of the boards and their height make them particularly likely to injure pedestrians.

They may also force people to step into the road in order to pass them, and this places blind and partially sighted people at greater risk from on-coming traffic.

Street design which is not inclusive can result in blind and partially sighted people being unable to get out and about with confidence and independence.

2.2 RNIB's 2015 report "Who put that there!" found that 95 per cent of blind and partially sighted people had collided with an obstacle in their local neighbourhood over a three month period.²

3. Temporary A-board ban in Edinburgh

3.1 The Committee will also be aware that the City of Edinburgh Council's Transport and Environment Committee voted for a ban on temporary on-street advertising including A-boards, flag adverts and city tour boards. The ban came into force on 5 November 2018 and is currently in its probation year at the end of which it will be reviewed by the Transport and Environment Committee (TEC). The ban is a blanket ban across the city. There was a relaxation of the ban for advertising related to the Edinburgh Festival. There are no other exemptions or exceptions to the ban.

3.2 Praise for the ban from blind and partially sighted people has been universally positive. As a whole, people felt the ban had made streets safer and that there had been a significant and noticeable decrease in street clutter. In September 2019 focus group attendees told RNIB Scotland:

"A-boards were a problem because in narrow streets they block off a big chunk of the pavement, in wider streets their position was unpredictable so you didn't know where you were going to come across them. Getting rid of them completely in all circumstances made for a much clearer path."

² "Who put that there!" – The barriers to blind and partially sighted people getting out and about [February 2015 report]
<https://www.rnib.org.uk/sites/default/files/Who%20put%20that%20there%21%20Report%20February%202015.pdf>

“Edinburgh Council do need commended on the way they’ve enforced it and the way they launched it with consultation and notification. It seems to have, in my experience, made it universally adopted by retailers and businesses. It has been effective as well as helpful.”

“You don’t have to worry about A-boards being an obstruction and them being in one place one day and another place the next and you don’t have to worry about struggling to get down the pavement. It makes it a lot safer and easier to get about.”

3.3 We also attach FSB Scotland’s recommendations in light of the proposed changes in Edinburgh

4. RNIB Recommendations

4.1 RNIB is fully supportive of the aims of this proposed Ban.

4.2 A postcode lottery approach to policy and decision making by those who have an impact on the local design and enforcement of the street environment is having a negative impact on blind and partially sighted people. Local authority staff, residents and businesses would all benefit from more clarity, and policy statements would help inform decision making at a local level. It would also help to address some of the inequality due to local authorities taking differing approaches to some of the most common problems.

4.3 All local authorities in Wales should explore the following options, working with blind and partially sighted people:

- Conduct audits and introduce a zero tolerance policy to A-boards.
- Produce clear guidelines for businesses.
- Work with local blind and partially sighted people to monitor and mitigate the impact of any temporary obstructions that appear on the highway.
- Work with local business owners to make them realise how advertising-boards cause real difficulties for blind and partially sighted people and to consider alternative forms of advertising.

In summary, RNIB Cymru is fully supportive of the aims of this Ban and of the Petition’s submitter Angharad Paget-Jones.

For further information, please contact Elin Edwards, External Affairs Manager. *Ysgrifennwch ataf yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.*

Yours sincerely,
Elin Edwards
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