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## Main Results and Findings

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1: Introduction

Cheshire West and Chester Council is reviewing its policy on the use of ‘A’ boards in Chester city centre. In April 2016, a 12 week consultation was launched to gather views from various groups, such as residents, the disabled community and local businesses, about the two proposed options to control ‘A’ boards – a licensing regime and a zero tolerance approach. Focus groups were held with members of the Council’s View West citizens’ panel who live within a distance of five miles from Chester city centre, or work in Chester.

Discussions were also held with representatives of local businesses based in the city centre, as well as a focus group carried out at DIAL House with representatives of the local disabled community. Alongside these discussions, an online survey was made available from Tuesday 12th April for 12 weeks for people to convey their views, as well as paper copies available upon request.

2: Key messages and summaries

Below are the key messages and summaries from the survey (173 respondents) and discussion groups with residents, businesses and people with disabilities. Any percentages quoted are from the survey results.

2.1: Key messages

Key messages

- Overall there were mixed views about the use of ‘A’ boards, with strong opinions for and against them:
  - Businesses and some residents were strongly in favour of them
  - People with disabilities and some residents were strongly against them.
- Just under two-thirds (63%) thought that ‘A’ boards were a very or fairly big problem. Just over half (52%) said they have been negatively affected by them, which was supported by everyone at the discussion group with disabled people.
- Over a third (37%) thought that ‘A’ boards were not a big problem or no problem at all. Just over a fifth (22%) said they have been positively affected by them, including everyone at the discussion group with businesses. A quarter (25%) said they had not been affected by them.

continued on next page…
2.2: Summaries of the survey results and discussion groups

Overall, there were mixed views about the use of ‘A’ boards, with some residents, along with businesses, being in favour of them. However, other residents were in agreement with the disabled community and were against the use of the boards.

2.2.1: Survey results

- There were mixed views from the survey results - some respondents were in favour of the use of boards and some against.

- Just under two-thirds (63%) of respondents felt that ‘A’ boards were either a very or fairly big problem, whereas 17% thought that they are not a problem at all.

- When asked to indicate their preferred option, 52% of respondents selected zero tolerance, 41% chose a licensing regime, and the remaining 7% had no preference.

- Just over a fifth (22%) of respondents indicated that they have been affected by ‘A’ boards in a positive way.

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Key messages continued...

- For the preferred option:
  - 52% chose the Zero Tolerance option, supported by everyone at the discussion group with disabled people:
    - Many commented about them being a hazard
    - Many did not think the Licensing Regime enforcement policy would be effective.
  - 41% chose the Licensing Regime option, supported by everyone at the discussion group with businesses:
    - Businesses said they were essential to attract customers
    - Some residents found them useful
    - Some disagreed with some of the conditions and the administration charge.
  - 7% had no preference.

- Overall, about two-thirds (68%) agreed with the proposed enforcement procedures and about a quarter (26%) disagreed.

- About two-thirds (69%) agreed with the proposed review area but over a quarter (28%) disagreed and gave various suggestions to extend it.
Some of those in favour of the boards felt that businesses rely on ‘A’ boards as a key advertising tool to raise awareness of the location of smaller independent businesses situated on the Rows, or tucked away in less prominent locations such as Rufus Court or Godstall Lane.

Some felt that the boards provide useful information about offers and promotions, etc., that they otherwise would not know about.

Some respondents felt that the boards contribute to creating a vibrant and lively retail centre, which can attract people to Chester and ultimately generates income.

Some people felt that ‘A’ boards are not an issue and no changes should be made.

- Just over half (52%) of respondents said they had been negatively affected by ‘A’ boards.
- Those who were against ‘A’ boards commented that they are obstructive, especially for disabled people and parents pushing prams/pushchairs.
- Some people felt that ‘A’ boards are a hazard and are generally dangerous. They can cause injury by causing people to trip/fall over them and can blow over or into people in windy conditions.
- Some respondents expressed disapproval at their appearance, commenting that ‘A’ boards look unattractive and make the city look cluttered.
- Some respondents commented that alfresco dining is just as much, if not more of an issue, than ‘A’ boards as the tables and chairs can be very obstructive.

- When asked about the specifics of the licensing regime, there were varying levels of agreement with the proposed conditions for ‘A’ boards’ positioning (57% agreed), size and number (65% agreed), construction (78% agreed) and other requirements (59% agreed).
- Over two-thirds of respondents agreed with the proposed enforcement procedures of the licensing regime.
- Those against the licensing regime expressed various concerns about the concept and proposed conditions in general – areas of concern included cost, complexity, compliance, enforcement and charges.
- Just over two-thirds (69%) agreed with the proposed review area but over a quarter (28%) disagreed.

2.2.2: Discussion groups with residents

- There were mixed views from these groups - some were in favour of the use of boards and some against.
- Those in favour commented that the boards provide useful information about the location of businesses situated on the Rows or locations such as Rufus Court etc.
- Some participants felt that they are an important advertising method for smaller businesses.
Some residents thought that the boards help to create a vibrant retail centre which will attract people to the city.

- Those against the use of ‘A’ boards felt there are too many in the city, making them on a whole very obstructive.
- Some people felt that they are hazardous and cause people to trip/fall over them
- Some thought that they are not a necessity for businesses to be able to advertise
- Some residents felt that they ruin the appearance of the city.

- There were mixed views about the proposed options for ‘A’ boards, some favouring the licensing regime and others expressing a preference for zero tolerance.
- Regarding the licensing regime, some residents felt that the conditions are too complicated, and overall this option could be too complex and expensive to enforce.
- There was some agreement with the review area, however some disagreed and gave various suggestions to extend it.

2.2.3: Discussion groups with businesses

- Business representatives overall were strongly in favour of the use of ‘A’ boards.
  - Participants expressed that the use of ‘A’ boards is essential for them to advertise their businesses, especially smaller, more independent businesses situated on the Rows or in locations such as Godstall Lane
  - Attendees felt that ‘A’ boards are not obstructive and do not present as a danger to the public.
- Businesses were in favour of a licensing regime rather than zero tolerance approach.
- There were no specific objections to any of the licensing conditions listed or the enforcement procedures.
- Businesses were strongly against the proposed charges associated with the licensing regime, as they felt that they already pay high rates.
- Most businesses agreed with the review area, however it was pointed out it is unfair if a competitor’s premises is just outside of the area and will not be affected.
- Participants were keen to know what alternative advertising methods they would be able to use if the zero tolerance option was adopted.

2.2.4: Discussion group with the disabled community

- All participants at this group were strongly opposed to the use of ‘A’ boards, and could not identify any positive points of having them.
  - Members of the group felt that the boards are obstructive and make accessibility in Chester even more difficult than it already is for disabled people
Attendees felt that ‘A’ boards are a major safety issue, not just for disabled people but for the public in general, as it is easy for people to trip or fall over them and injure themselves.

It was also remarked on by participants about the obstructive nature of metal ‘A’ boards used by Highways to inform the public about forthcoming roadworks and events.

- Participants felt that the use of ‘A’ boards is not essential for businesses, and banning them will make no difference to their income levels.
- All attendees were in favour of the zero tolerance approach.
- There were concerns that if the licensing regime is adopted, businesses will not comply and enforcement will not work.
- There was some disagreement with the review area, as participants felt that more locations need to be included and gave examples.
- The group advised the Council to look at other areas in the country where zero tolerance has worked, such as Manchester and Hull.
- Participants recognised the need for alternative advertising methods for businesses.

3: Background and options

3.1: What is an ‘A’ board?
An ‘A’ board is typically an ‘A’ shape frame advertising board generally made of timber with some form of hinge at the apex, although other styles exist, such as those consisting of a sign mounted on a heavy base.

3.2: Why are ‘A’ boards an issue?
‘A’ boards are common across Chester, and more are being displayed in Chester’s streets, which can create problems for pedestrians who have to get around pavement signage, especially people who are visually impaired, those with mobility issues, wheelchair users and parents and carers with pushchairs. It is also considered that the growth in the number of boards makes the city look cluttered and less attractive.

The boards are a particular issue in Chester city centre as a result of the large number of boards on display in the city’s many narrow, often cobbled streets. In addition, the existence of retail outlets on two levels – on the Rows and at street level – means that there is a larger number of retailers with ‘A’ boards competing for street level space than is the case in many towns and cities.

It is appreciated that businesses need to promote their services and bring in custom, and it is important to encourage retail and commercial activity. However, this needs to be done whilst considering the safety of passing pedestrians and the effect on the street scene and the local economy.
3.3: What has already been done about ‘A’ boards?

It is an offence to obstruct the highway or to display an advertisement without consent. Legislation allows, however, for licensing schemes managed by a local authority. In early 2011, in an attempt to control the use of ‘A’ boards, the Council introduced a set of Toleration Guidelines as a pilot scheme. The guidelines rely on businesses regulating themselves, but, despite an intensive awareness–raising campaign, widespread non-compliance continued.

3.4: What are the options now?

As a result of this, the Council is considering two options to deal with the issue – a licensing regime or a zero tolerance approach. It is important to note at this point, that the proposed options are only in relation to the display of ‘A’ boards in the city’s streets, and do not have a bearing on any ‘A’ boards displayed on private land.

3.4.1: Licensing Regime

The key features of the proposed licensing regime option are:

- Businesses in the defined area (see map in section 6) would have to apply for a licence to display an ‘A’ board
- The licence would be granted under the Highways Act 1980 if the ‘A’ board was approved following assessment by a highways officer
- Advertisement consent would also be required, and this could be built in to a single application process
- Formal action may be taken against businesses/business owners who display an ‘A’ board without a licence (see section 8.6 for details on the enforcement procedures).
- Formal action may be taken against licence holders who fail to comply with the licence conditions in accordance with the Council’s published process for non-compliance (see section 8.6 for details on the enforcement procedures).
- The indicative cost of a licence would be in the region of £250 for initial approval, and £75 for licence renewal every 12 months to cover the cost of the scheme.

3.4.2: Zero Tolerance

The key features of the proposed zero tolerance policy option are:

- No businesses would be permitted to display an ‘A’ board within the highway (highway includes the pavement and walkway part of the Rows)
- Any boards on display would be removed
- Formal action (simple caution or prosecution, usually following a warning) could be taken against businesses/business owners who display an ‘A’ board.
4: Focus group participants

4.1: Discussions with residents

On Monday 18th April 2016, two focus groups were held at the Wesley Centre in Chester city centre to obtain residents’ views about the proposed options for ‘A’ boards. The groups were made up of View West panel members and other interested residents who had been invited to the discussions. In total, 33 people attended and were split into two separate discussion groups, each of which was facilitated by one officer, with another officer taking notes.

4.2: Discussions with businesses

Earlier on Monday 18th April 2016, two focus groups were held at the Wesley Centre in Chester city centre to obtain the views of local businesses about the proposed options. The groups were made up of a variety of businesses based in the city centre, with 20 representatives attending. As with the residents’ groups, each discussion was facilitated by one officer, with another officer taking notes.

4.3: Discussions with the disabled community

On Thursday 23rd June 2016, a discussion group was held at DIAL House at the regular Access group meeting to obtain the views of the local disabled community about the proposed options for ‘A’ boards. The group was made up of 16 people with varying disabilities, including wheelchair users and people with visual and hearing impairments. This discussion was facilitated by one officer, with two additional officers assisting and taking notes.

5: Survey respondents

In total, 173 people completed either the online survey or a paper copy of the questionnaire (see Appendix for details). The responses to a number of questions in the survey gave a general profile of respondents including gender, age, disability etc. Although 173 questionnaires were completed, not everyone answered all of the questions.

5.1: Type of respondent

- Over half (53%) of respondents are residents of Chester who are living outside of the proposed area of interest.
- Just under half of the respondents (45%) either work in the proposed area of interest, or own/manage a local business (this excludes duplicate responses from 8 respondents)
- A fifth of respondents (20%) are visitors to Chester, e.g. tourist, shopper, etc.

The table below gives more details:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of respondent</th>
<th>No. of respondents in each group</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents in each group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business owner/manager within proposed area of review</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business owner/manager in Chester outside proposed area of review</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of Chester living within proposed area of review</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of Chester living outside proposed area of review</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of Cheshire West and Chester</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person working within the proposed area of review</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor to the proposed area of review (shopper, tourist etc.)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Member of Cheshire West and Chester Council</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of voluntary or community organisation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bases for %: 152

*Please note the percentages do not equal 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

### 5.2: Local businesses

A range of businesses completed the survey, including some whose premises are situated on the rows, street level and set back from the main city centre stretch. Different types of businesses responded, including those from the retail sector and eating/drinking establishments.

### 5.3: Postcodes of respondents

The vast majority of people who answered this question gave a Chester postcode, however there were a few respondents from the Ellesmere Port, Northwich, Frodsham and Warrington areas.

### 5.4: Gender and age of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base for %: 139

The above table shows that more than half of respondents (59%) were male, 38% were female and 3% of people preferred not to state their gender.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 54</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 - 64</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 - 74</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Base for %: 139**

This table shows that respondents were from a wide range of age groups:

- Almost half (45%) of people who completed a questionnaire were aged 55 or over
- A third (33%) of respondents were between the ages of 16 and 44.

### 5.5: Disabilities of respondents

Respondents were asked if they had a long term illness, health issue or disability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Base for %: 136**

The above table shows that 12% of people responded ‘Yes’ to this question. The next question asked respondents to indicate which category of health issue or disability applied to them. Of those who answered this question:

- Nine people had a long standing illness or health condition
- Six people had mobility issues, for example, use a wheelchair
- Six people had a visual impairment
- Two people indicated they had a hearing impairment
- Other responses included learning disability or difficulty (two) and Mental Health issue (one)
- Five respondents had more than one disability.
5.6: Ethnicity and religion of respondents

- All 129 people who answered this question classed themselves as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British (99%) or another White background.
- Almost half of people who stated their religion were Christian (48%).
- Almost all of the remaining respondents said they either had no religion (35%) or chose not to say (14%).
Main Results and Findings

This section details the statistical results from the survey and uses the comments from the survey respondents and focus group participants, to understand the reasons behind the answers.

6: Proposed review area

The proposed area of review for which the chosen option would apply, includes all Chester city centre streets within and including the boundary of the A5268 (St Martin’s Way, Nicholas Street, Pepper Street, Little St John Street, Vicars Lane, Union Street, and St Oswald’s Way), and including Lower Bridge Street and Brook Street to its boundary with Francis Street, but excluding private land. A map of this area is shown below.
6.1: How often the area is visited

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked how often they visit the area shown in the map.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I live there</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost every day</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a week</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a month</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About twice a year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have never visited the area</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base for %: 173

The table shows that 70% of respondents either live within or visit this area of Chester almost every day, and just under a quarter (23%), go to the area at least once a week.

At all of the focus groups, all attendees indicated that they either live or work in Chester city centre, or visit Chester regularly.

6.2: Views about the proposed area

Participants were asked whether or not they agree or disagree with the area proposed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base for %: 173

The above table shows that over two thirds (69%) of people who completed the questionnaire agreed with the proposed area. Those who indicated that they disagreed with this area did so for the following reasons:

- It was felt by some that the area should cover the whole of Chester, not just the city centre. Particular locations mentioned by survey and focus group participants were:
  - The Groves/Riverside,
  - Hoole (e.g. Faulkner Street)
  - Handbridge (Overleigh Road)
  - City Road
Brook Street (remainder not already covered),
Station Road
Vicinity of the Little Roodee car park.

- Some people felt that the review should not just be limited to Chester and should be borough-wide.
- Some respondents thought that a blanket approach is inappropriate as all streets and businesses are different, so a ‘one size fits all’ approach cannot apply.
- One business representative pointed out that it is unfair that their business will be subjected to the proposed changes, but their competitor will not as they are located outside of the review area.

It is also worth noting that almost half of people who wrote an answer to this question, used it to express their opinions about ‘A’ boards in general. This feedback will be covered later on in this report.

7: Views about ‘A’ boards in general

7.1: Extent of problem of ‘A’ boards

Respondents were asked how much of a problem, if at all, ‘A’ boards present in the specified area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very big problem</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly big problem</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a big problem</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a problem at all</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/not applicable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base for %: 173

The table shows that almost two-thirds (63%) felt that ‘A’ boards are either a very or fairly big problem. A fifth (20%) of respondents thought that they are not a big problem, and almost the same proportion (17%) said they are not a problem at all.

There was a significant difference in opinion between the focus groups with disabled people and businesses. The disabled group stated very strongly that ‘A’ boards bring nothing positive at all to Chester, and identified a number of problems that they present. However, the business representatives felt that they pose no problem whatsoever and were essential to attract customers to their business.
### 7.2: Effect of ‘A’ boards

Another question asked was whether or not respondents have been affected by ‘A’ boards (in a positive or negative way) in the last 12 months.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive way</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative way</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Base for %: 172**

The above table shows that just over half (52%) of respondents have been affected by ‘A’ boards in a negative way, whereas just over a fifth (22%) have been affected positively. People who had been affected were asked to expand on their answer and say how – this feedback is shown in the table below. The same question was asked at each of the focus groups - comments made during these discussions were mostly of a similar nature to the responses received from survey participants.

Positive feedback about ‘A’ boards received from the survey question and at the discussions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive feedback</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Residents group</th>
<th>Business group</th>
<th>Disabled group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘A’ boards are a key advertising tool to raise awareness of the location of any shops, restaurants, etc., that members of the public would otherwise have no idea are there.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘A’ boards are essential in raising awareness of small independent businesses situated on the Rows, or tucked away at locations such as Rufus Court or Godstall Lane – these businesses rely heavily on this advertising method to survive and the boards enable these businesses to compete with larger businesses positioned in a more prominent place.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The boards provide useful information about offers and promotions, etc., that passers-by would not know about otherwise, so they help to attract custom and therefore generate income.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The boards contribute to creating a vibrant and lively retail centre, which attracts people to the city.

Their appearance is likeable as they give the city character.

‘A’ boards do not present as a safety issue.

‘A’ boards are not obstructive, there is plenty of space to manoeuvre around them.

The above table shows that much of the same feelings about the positive aspects of ‘A’ boards were shared by survey respondents and attendees of the residents’ and business focus groups. Attendees at the disabled community discussion failed to identify any positive aspects of ‘A’ boards. It is important to note that the business representatives expressed more strength of feeling about the positive attributes of the boards than the residents’ groups.

Negative feedback about ‘A’ boards included:

The boards are obstructive and force people to go in the road or weave in and out of the boards on the pavement. This is not safe, causes congestion of pedestrians and slows people down.

‘A’ boards are a hazard and are generally dangerous. They can cause injury by causing people to trip/fall over them and in windy conditions can blow over or into people.

It was mentioned how difficult and dangerous it can be for particular individuals to move around town, particularly those who are:
- wheelchair and mobility scooter users
- visually impaired
- parents pushing prams/pushchairs.

The volume of ‘A’ boards is excessive –
There are too many.

‘A’ boards look unattractive and make the city look cluttered.

The boards are unnecessary and businesses don’t need them to generate trade, the public already know that the businesses are there.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative feedback</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Residents group</th>
<th>Business group</th>
<th>Disabled group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>there are too many.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘A’ boards look unattractive and make the city look cluttered.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The boards are unnecessary and businesses don’t need them to generate trade, the</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public already know that the businesses are there.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that survey respondents, residents and the disabled community shared much of the same negative opinions about the boards, whereas the representatives from businesses did not express any negative views about ‘A’ boards.

It is important to note that the disabled community felt very strongly about the negative impact of the boards, more so than the residents’ groups. It is also worth noting that of the people who answered this question in the survey, almost half passed comment about the boards being obstructive, and almost a quarter felt that the boards are a hazard and can be dangerous. Some survey answers and feedback from the disabled group included personal stories of themselves, or someone they know, obtaining an injury by falling or tripping over an ‘A’ board. One attendee also referred to a report produced by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) in February 2015 entitled ‘Who put that there!’, which states that almost half of all blind and partially sighted people have collided with an ‘A’ board in the last three months. It was also brought up that studies show that the presence of ‘A’ boards has no economic impact on businesses.

8: Views about Option A: Licensing Regime

The proposed licence conditions are based on the current Toleration Guidelines in place, with some necessary changes made to reflect that they would be licence conditions, as opposed to guidelines. Feedback received has also been taken into account. The conditions are concerned with the ‘A’ boards’ positioning, size and number, construction, and some conditions come under an ‘other requirements’ category.

8.1: General views of a Licensing Regime

Before going into the detail about the particular licensing conditions proposed, there were mixed views from participants about the idea of a licensing regime and the conditions in general. Some felt that if managed and monitored correctly, this option could work well. There were however, a number of negative points expressed about this option.
General negative feedback about this option included:

- **Cost** – both of the residents’ and disabled groups as well as survey participants felt that this option would be expensive to run and enforce.

- **Complexity** – residents’ and disabled groups along with survey respondents thought that the conditions are unnecessarily complicated, so were therefore of the opinion that a zero tolerance approach would be simpler and easier to manage.

- **Common sense** – some survey respondents were in favour of a more common sense approach, recognising that ‘not one size fits all’ as some of the conditions will not be appropriate for all streets, for example, C1 on narrow streets (see below).

- **Unnecessary** – some survey respondents felt that ‘A’ boards don’t present as enough of a problem to warrant such conditions.

- **Enforcement** - it was strongly questioned by residents and the disabled community who would be monitoring the regime and how this is going to happen. These participants did not have much confidence that the regime would be enforceable.

- **Compliance** - members of the disabled community felt that businesses will not comply with these conditions, as they have already failed to adhere to the set tolerance guidelines. Also, due to the complexity of the conditions, businesses may unintentionally fail to comply.

- **Charges** – members of the business community were extremely averse to the proposed cost of a licence, which resulted in some participants saying that a licensing regime is seemingly the ‘lesser of the two evils’ (of the two options). Businesses felt that they are already paying high rates and see no positive result or treatment from the council as a result. They felt that the Council should be more supportive to local businesses, and should be helping to make the city a lively and thriving retail centre rather than making things more difficult for them. Charges for ‘A’ boards were seen by many as another money-making exercise by the council, adding further financial pressure to smaller, independent businesses who are already struggling to survive in Chester. It was also pointed out by some residents that the charge should be reduced for smaller businesses.

- **Fairness** - it was expressed by some survey respondents that it is unfair to treat all businesses of different sizes (staff-wise and premises) the same, as the conditions in general will have more of a detrimental effect on smaller businesses and those who are tucked away or situated on the Rows.

Some people used the section of the questionnaire dedicated to the licensing regime to state that they are opposed to ‘A’ boards in general, and support the zero tolerance approach overall.
8.2: Positioning of ‘A’ boards
Respondents were asked to give their opinion about the proposed conditions for the positioning of ‘A’ boards, which are:

C1. There must be a minimum unobstructed footway width of 1.8 metres when the ‘A’ board is displayed. (Explanatory Note: Unobstructed footway width is measured either from the ‘A’ board position to the edge footway or from the ‘A’ board position to the frontage of the building. There will be streets where the footway width is less than 1.8 metres. In such cases ‘A’ boards cannot be displayed.)

C2. In pedestrianised areas (including streets in which vehicular traffic is prohibited at certain times) there must be a minimum width of 3.7 metres available for pedestrians and for access by emergency vehicles. (Explanatory Note: The requirement here is for a greater unobstructed width than in a non-pedestrianised street, but this includes both the footway and carriageway as both may be used by pedestrians).

C3. ‘A’ Boards must not be placed on the carriageway, except in pedestrianised streets where vehicular traffic is prohibited.

C4. On footways, ‘A’ boards must not be placed within 2.0 metres of any tactile paving or within 2.5 metres of any tactile paving in pedestrianised areas. (Explanatory note: Tactile paving is a textured paving surface found on footpaths, (and elsewhere, e.g. on stairs and train station platforms) to assist pedestrians who are blind or visually impaired by warning them of a hazard such as the end of a footway and the beginning of a carriageway).

C5. The ‘A’ board must always be placed in the approved position and the position must be consistent on a day-to-day basis.

C6. ‘A’ boards will not be permitted near bus stops, pedestrian crossings, etc.

C7. No ‘A’ boards will be permitted on the walkway part of The Rows.

C8. Subject to condition C9 below, ‘A’ boards must relate only to the normal business of the trading establishment in front of which they are displayed, be positioned directly outside the premises to which they relate and on the same side of the road.

C9. Exceptionally, directional boards may be licensed, but only if: the written permission of any business in front of which the board is to be displayed is obtained and all other licence conditions are satisfied.

C10. All boards must be portable and easy to remove i.e. they require no excavation to be installed or removed. They should not have a detrimental effect on the fabric of the highway (e.g. they must not be drilled into paving).

C11. ‘A’ boards must not be fixed to lamp posts, bollards, seats, highway trees or other items of street furniture by means of chains, rope, etc.
8.2.1: General agreement/disagreement with the ‘positioning’ conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that 155 people answered this question, with 40% disagreeing with the conditions listed. It is worth noting that a few survey respondents stated that the positioning/placement of the boards is more of a problem than other issues, such as the size and number etc.

It was at this point in some of the focus groups that participants expressed either a general belief that the conditions could work, or their overall concerns about this option in general (see section 8.1). Some disabled participants felt that it is unrealistic to believe that the positioning conditions will be adhered to.

8.2.2: Views in relation to specific conditions

Feedback received about specific conditions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| C1        | • 1.8 metres is not wide enough, especially for wheelchairs to be able to pass through.  
• Chester has some narrow streets, therefore some footways do not measure up to 1.8 metres in width to start with, especially those with both pedestrian and cycle lanes. (Note: the condition states that in this case no ‘A’ boards will be allowed).  
• There were a few comments that the boards should not be positioned in the middle of the street, and should be placed up against the building – however this may be more obstructive for visually impaired people who sometimes use the edge of buildings as a guide. |
| C2        | No specific comments received |
| C3        | • There were a couple of comments from people saying that this needs to be adhered to. |
| C4        | • Agreement from the disabled community – St Werburgh Street was given as an example of where this is an issue. |
| C5        | • Helpful for visually impaired people to become more familiar with where they will be.  
• Irrelevant for visitors/tourists who are unfamiliar with the city. |
### Condition Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C6</th>
<th>• There were a few comments stating that this condition is too vague and needs more detail.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>• Agreement that it is dangerous to have boards in the walkway of the Rows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It was recognised that this could be unfair to businesses located on the Rows as they need more help in advertising than those clearly visible on street level – possibly allow ‘A’ boards on the ground for the businesses located on the Rows but not those on street level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An element of confusion as to whether a business situated on the Rows is allowed to display an ‘A’ board at street level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C8</td>
<td>• No specific comments received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C9</td>
<td>• A couple of people disagreed with this, saying that directional signs should be no exception to the regime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C10</td>
<td>• One business representative mentioned that in the Netherlands, a street level hole is provided to allow all businesses to safely secure their ‘A’ boards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C11</td>
<td>• Some agreement as people can trip over chains, rope etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.3: Size and number of ‘A’ boards

Respondents were asked to give their opinion about the proposed conditions for the size and number of ‘A’ boards, which are:

C12. ‘A’ boards should be no wider than 600mm and no higher than 1000mm above ground level.

C13. Only one ‘A’ board is permitted per business.

#### 8.3.1: General agreement/disagreement with the ‘size and number’ conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that 159 people answered this question, almost a third of whom (30%) disagreed with the two conditions listed.

At this point in some of the focus groups, participants expressed either a general belief that the conditions could work, or their overall concerns (see section 8.1).
8.3.2: Views in relation to specific conditions

Feedback received about these specific conditions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| C12       | - Some survey respondents and disabled participants felt that having smaller ‘A’ boards will make them less visible, so may present as more of a trip hazard.  
- Some people felt that smaller boards will not work in attracting people’s attention.  
- Some business representatives agreed that it is good to standardise the size of the boards, favouring uniformity so all businesses are on an even keel. |
| C13       | - Because some businesses are tucked away, they need extra help in being brought to the public’s attention, so may need more than one directional sign for different entry points.  
- Some people agreed with a business only being allowed one board.  
- The question was raised by residents and businesses regarding buildings/locations that house multiple businesses, for example Godstall Lane – there was a view that this stretch should be allowed either more than one board per business, or the boards could feature multiple businesses. |

8.4: Construction of ‘A’ boards

Respondents were asked to give their opinion about the proposed conditions for the construction of ‘A’ boards:

C14. ‘A’ boards must be of high quality construction and maintained in safe condition. For example, they must have no protruding elements that could cause passers-by to trip or fall, or that could cause other injury or damage, e.g. sharp edges, splinters.

C15. ‘A’ boards should be stable and not represent a potential danger to any highway users. In particular, the structure must be of sufficient weight or design to prevent it being blown over in the wind. Rotating or swinging signs will not be permitted. Weighting by sandbags will not be permitted. As a precaution, ‘A’ boards should not be displayed in particularly windy conditions.
8.4.1: Agreement/disagreement with the conditions for construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that 158 people answered this question, over three-quarters of whom (78%) agreed with the conditions listed.

At this point in the questionnaire, a few people expressed agreement with these conditions in general, feeling that they are a sensible approach to adopt. At this stage in some of the focus groups, attendees expressed either a general belief that the conditions could work, or their overall concerns of the regime in general (see section 8.1).

8.4.2: Views in relation to specific conditions

Comments which related to specific conditions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| C14       | - Two comments from the survey were in agreement with this condition, stating that the boards need to be safe and sturdy so they don’t fall over.  
- Some survey respondents expressed concern that when boards fall over, they can fold up and trap people’s fingers or then become trip hazards when they are lying on the floor. |
| C15       | - Reference to windy conditions is too vague and open to interpretation, so some people will bring in their ‘A’ boards whereas others will not think it is too windy and leave theirs out.  
- There was some agreement that this is an issue as some streets in Chester are like wind tunnels and large vehicles can create gusts.  
- Some business representatives felt that this is common sense, and recognised that wind is an issue when it comes to ‘A’ boards.  
- A few people thought that swinging signs might be better in windy conditions, as they were less likely to be blown over. |
8.5: Other requirements of ‘A’ boards

People were asked to give their feedback about the proposed conditions for ‘other requirements’ of ‘A’ boards, these being:

C16. ‘A’ boards must be sensitively designed and colour scheme must be appropriate having regard to the character of the building near which they are to be displayed and/or the general characteristics of the locality.

C17. ‘A’ boards may only be displayed during the times stated in the licence and not during hours when the business is not open.

C18. All ‘A’ boards must be removed prior to and during events likely to result in significant increase in the level of footfall (e.g. festivals, marathons or other races, religious parades and other public events). In particular, ‘A’ Boards will not be permitted in Watergate Street on Race Days.

C19. ‘A’ boards must not contain any visual or written material that could be construed as being racist, sexist, homophobic or insulting.

C20. The ‘A’ board licence must be available for inspection at the relevant business during opening hours.

C21. The licensee shall indemnify the Council against all actions, proceedings, costs, claims or demands whatsoever in respect of any injury or damage arising from the siting of the ‘A’ Board.

C22. Holders of a licence must have and maintain a public liability insurance policy with cover up to £5,000,000 (five million pounds).

8.5.1: Agreement/disagreement with the ‘other’ conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>156</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that 156 people answered this question, over a third of which (35%) disagreed with the conditions listed.

At this point in the questionnaire, a few people expressed their agreement with these conditions in general. At this stage in some of the focus groups, attendees expressed either a general belief that the conditions could work, or their overall concerns about the regime in general (see section 8.1).
8.5.2: Views in relation to specific conditions

Comments which related to specific conditions were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| C16       | • Almost a fifth of those who answered this question in the survey disagreed with this condition, because they felt that judging the appearance of a board could be too subjective, and the council should not be able to dictate this.  
• Some residents at the focus groups felt that this would be difficult to manage as some businesses would want to keep their corporate logos and design on their boards.  
• Some business representatives favoured a uniform design of all ‘A’ boards, with some requesting whether there would be a template design available to them. Some suggested an in-keeping design suitable and relevant to Chester itself. |
| C17       | • Members of the disabled community said that ‘A’ boards are always out and this may not be adhered to. |
| C18       | • Almost a quarter of people who responded to this in the survey disagreed with this condition, as they felt it is unfair that Chester holding a race day should dictate whether or not ‘A’ boards are allowed to be displayed. It was also seen as unfair on visually impaired people, as this condition gives the impression that consideration is being given to racegoers and not disabled people.  
• Members of the disabled community felt very strongly about this, saying that it is very unfair that the Council would consider removing the boards for racegoers, but not disabled people.  
• There was agreement from businesses that this condition is sensible, however they are keen to adopt an alternative advertising method on these days. |
| C19       | • Some survey participants felt that this condition is unnecessary and shouldn’t have to be spelt out. |
| C20       | • No specific comments received |
| C21       | • Concerns were raised by residents about insurance implications. |
| C22       | • Some survey participants, residents and some businesses disagreed with this amount, feeling that it is excessive.  
• Some business representatives stated that the standard amount is £2,000,000 (two million pounds) and this should remain the case otherwise, the cost of their insurance will increase.  
• Disabled people felt that this amount is unfair on small businesses as they will not be on the same footing as larger businesses. |
8.6: Enforcement Procedure

As part of the licensing regime, it is proposed that enforcement procedures would be adopted to regulate the regime. Survey respondents and focus group participants were asked to give their opinion about these procedures, which are:

**Enforcement Procedure: for non-licensed ‘A’ boards on the highway**

(i) Where an ‘A’ board is unlicensed the business owner will be asked to remove it immediately.

(ii) If this request is not complied with the Council may remove the item and charge the costs incurred for removal and/or storage to the business being advertised on the ‘A’ Board.

(iii) If persistent siting of an unlicensed ‘A’ Board continues the Council will take whatever action it deems appropriate in each individual case, up to and including seizure of the ‘A’ board and prosecution.

Note: Where an ‘A’ board is considered by the Council to constitute a danger to the public the board may be removed immediately without further notice.

**Enforcement Procedure: failure to comply with the licence conditions**

Should the licence holder not comply with the terms of their licence, the Council will try to work with him/her in the first instance to resolve any issues. This procedure will be:

(i) Where the licensee is found not to be complying with the specific conditions of his/her individual licence, Council officers will offer advice and assistance to enable the licensee to rectify the breaches to ensure compliance.

(ii) Where non-compliance continues, a letter will be sent informing the licensee that s/he continues to be in breach of the conditions of the licence. Further assistance will be offered to the licensee to rectify any breaches but if compliance is not achieved within 14 days this may trigger step 3.

(iii) If persistent breaches of conditions remain the Council will take whatever action it deems appropriate in each individual case, up to and including seizure of the ‘A’ board and prosecution.

Note: Where an ‘A’ board is considered by the Council to constitute a danger to the public the board may be removed immediately without further notice.
8.6.1: Agreement/disagreement with the enforcement procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that 149 people answered this question in the survey, with over two thirds (68%) agreeing with the procedures overall, and over a quarter (26%) disagreeing.

8.6.2: Feedback about the procedures in general

Respondents were asked to give their reasons as to why they disagreed with the procedures. The answers given were all quite general comments, with no specific element of the procedures referred to.

- Some respondents questioned how practical it will be to carry out enforcement, especially in terms of who will be doing it and how much it will cost. This was especially felt by the disabled community, who did not have much confidence in enforcement in general.
- Some said that the presence of ‘A’ boards is not a big enough issue to warrant the work and expense to undertake these procedures. It was felt by these individuals that the Council should be focusing on other issues that are more important such as parking, road and pavement repairs, etc.
- It was commented by some that adopting these procedures would not be fair to Chester businesses, especially small-medium sized firms. It was felt that reviews such as this, along with increased rates, etc., will only serve to drive businesses out of the city.
- A few people commented that the guidelines are too strict and complex.
- A few respondents said that these procedures are unnecessary as the boards are not as much of a problem as other obstructions on the highway, such as alfresco dining.
- A few people thought that the enforcement procedures are not strict enough and should be more explicit and followed to the letter.
- It was noted that speedy responses are needed when an unlicensed board is reported.
- Some members of the disabled community questioned how an enforcement officer would be able to distinguish between a licensed and non-licensed ‘A’ board. For example, would a licensed board have a barcode displayed on it (which could be forged), or would there be a live database which can be accessed via an iPad.
- It was pointed out at the disabled group that some traders are only in the city on a temporary basis, so will not bother to apply for a licence.
- A few respondents felt that this is simply a money-making exercise for the council.
- Some business representatives felt that the procedures are straightforward, however will probably be expensive to govern.
- Some people used this question to convey again that they are completely against 'A' boards, and if the zero tolerance approach is adopted there is no need for a complex enforcement procedure.

### 8.7: Overall agreement and disagreement with the Licensing Regime conditions and enforcement procedures

The following chart summarises the percentages of respondents who agreed or disagreed with the proposed Licensing Regime conditions and enforcement procedures.

![Levels of agreement and disagreement with the Licensing Regime conditions and enforcement procedures](chart)

**Bases range from 149 to 159**
9: Views about Option B: Zero Tolerance

If a zero tolerance approach is to be adopted, this would mean that no businesses would be permitted to display ‘A’ boards within the highway (excluding private land).

Respondents were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with this way forward.

9.1: Agreement/disagreement with zero tolerance approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that 157 people answered this question, with over half (55%) expressing agreement with the zero tolerance approach. (Please note that in section 10, when respondents were asked to choose between a Licensing Regime and Zero Tolerance option, 52% chose the Zero Tolerance option).

There were mixed views at each of the focus groups about the zero tolerance approach. The disabled community were very much in favour of this option, whereas businesses were strongly against zero tolerance. There was a mix of views from the residents’ discussions, with some people in favour of zero tolerance and some against.

9.2: Reasons for agreeing with a zero tolerance approach

Survey respondents’ reasons for agreeing with zero tolerance were mainly to do with making the city more accessible, less hazardous (in terms of trips/falls), and improving the appearance of the city.

Attendees at the disabled community discussion were all unanimously, in favour of the zero tolerance option, mainly for accessibility purposes.

- Some disabled attendees felt very strongly about the subject of accessibility in Chester, stating that it is very difficult and stressful to get around the city centre - so much so that some people try to avoid going at all as they have no confidence in their ability to travel safely due to issues such as ‘A’ boards, vehicles parked on dropped kerbs and the obstructive nature of alfresco dining.

- It was felt by some that businesses and the Council have very little, or no consideration of the needs of the disabled community and that something needs to be done – starting with banning ‘A’ boards - and if this happens it shows that the Council values the views of the disabled community.
It had been advised that such schemes have been adopted in areas such as Hull and Manchester, and are working well. Reference was made to the report 'Who put that there? A street charter for Hull, 2016-2019'. Some members of the group were also keen to mention that banning ‘A’ boards will not just benefit themselves, but other more able-bodied people, such as parents with pushchairs and elderly people.

It was also felt that if no business was allowed an ‘A’ board, this would help bring all businesses onto a level playing field which would benefit those who cannot afford the cost of a licence.

9.2.1: Alternative advertising methods

There was agreement across all focus groups (especially businesses) and some survey respondents that if a zero tolerance approach is adopted, there needs to be alternative advertising methods available for businesses to be able to adopt. For example, it was commented that the use of banners placed on buildings has already been banned by the Council as some are listed buildings.

Members of the disabled and business groups said that the council should change these regulations to enable businesses (especially those on the Rows) to advertise in this way. Other suggestions from the disabled group included using location/directional signage in places (in-keeping with Chester's heritage), a bending flag signing system and internet/social media channels.

9.3: Reasons for disagreeing with a zero tolerance approach

Respondents and focus group participants who disagreed with the zero tolerance approach were asked to explain why they felt this way:

- Over a quarter of people who answered this question in the survey felt that businesses genuinely need 'A' boards for advertising purposes, as did the business representatives themselves at the focus group.
- Small businesses, as well as those located in a less prominent position, were highlighted as especially in need of the boards. It was felt that zero tolerance would have even more of a detrimental effect on these businesses than others.
- Some respondents felt that banning ‘A’ boards will damage trade in the city centre and will mean that businesses may have to leave or close, and ultimately this means job losses. There is a belief that the city should be a vibrant, retail centre and ‘A’ boards contribute to that.
- Some people favoured the licensing regime because they felt that if it is monitored and enforced properly, then ‘A’ boards should not be a problem.
- Some residents felt that the boards are useful in providing information about special offers, etc., to the public, and they would not have known about them if it wasn't for the ‘A’ board.
• A few people, including businesses, commented that ‘A’ boards are not enough of a significant problem to warrant being banned.

10: Preferred Option

Respondents of the survey were asked to indicate which their preferred option was – a licensing regime, or zero tolerance approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option A: Licensing Regime</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option B: Zero Tolerance</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that just over half (52%) of the 149 people who answered this question, indicated that zero tolerance is their preferred option. 41% chose the licensing regime as the way forward, whereas 10 people (7%) said they had no preference.

• There were mixed views from respondents who described themselves as visitors, although more chose the Zero Tolerance option.

• Most disabled respondents to the survey chose the Zero Tolerance option, as did some respondents who worked in the area. Very few respondents who owned a business in the area chose this option.

• Most respondents who were business owners chose the Licensing Regime option, as did some who worked in the area. Very few disabled respondents chose this option.

The overall results are also shown in the chart below.
The views from the residents’ focus groups were mixed. Participants in the business focus groups overwhelmingly chose the licensing regime and those in the discussion with the disabled community all chose the zero tolerance option.

**10.1: Reasons for people’s choices**

Respondents were asked to give the reasons why they chose a particular option.

Those who chose Option A, the Licensing Regime, did so for the following reasons:

- Some people felt that all businesses need advertising to attract customers, therefore, this is key for their survival in general otherwise their income may reduce due to less customers.
- Advertising is especially vital for businesses situated on the Rows who are reliant on ‘A’ boards to raise awareness that they exist. This is vital in enabling them to survive against their more prominent competitors positioned on street-level.
- Some people felt that the boards are useful in raising their awareness of businesses and special offers they didn’t know existed.
- Some participants felt that the boards can contribute to the city becoming a more vibrant and lively retail centre.
- Some people felt that if executed correctly, a licensing regime for ‘A’ boards could work well for everybody.
- Some people did not give a particular reason for choosing option A, and were just generally in favour – however, some respondents objected to the charge for the licence.

People who indicated Option B, Zero Tolerance, as their preference did so for the following reasons:

- Over a third of people who gave a reason for their choice favoured option B because they felt that the boards are obstructive and present as a hazard for anyone trying to get around the city, especially those with mobility issues or visual impairments.
- Some people favoured option B as they feel the boards make the city look less attractive.
- Some people preferred zero tolerance as they felt that businesses do not need the boards to advertise as the public are already aware they are there.
- Some respondents thought that a licensing regime will be too difficult to enforce.
- Some people thought that option B is preferable as it would be too expensive to adopt and maintain a licensing regime.

Some people felt that neither option should be implemented as the boards don’t pose a problem, so there should be no change.

During the focus groups, when participants were asked to choose their preferred option, the same comments they had previously expressed whilst discussing the particular options were reiterated.
11: Additional Comments

Participants were asked for any additional comments about the proposals for ‘A’ boards at the end of the survey. Some respondents used this question to reiterate their answers to previous questions, as did participants at the focus groups. Other responses not already discussed included:

- Respondents commented that alfresco dining is just as much as an issue as ‘A’ boards, if not more. These people remarked on how obstructive the tables and chairs can be, sometimes more so than advertising boards, It was commented, however, that this can give a more continental feel to the city.
- People holding advertising boards were also mentioned as an obstruction and unattractive.
- It was commented that Highways use metal ‘A’ boards when informing members of the public about upcoming roadworks and events, and these can also be very obstructive.
- It was commented that property numbers are not used anymore and should be, so that it’s easier to find premises.
- Some comments indicated that it should not be a case of choosing between just these two options, that there is a need for a ‘middle’ option too.

12: Next steps

It is intended that the results from this consultation will be shared with senior managers and Councillors who will take this into consideration when reviewing the policy. Results will then be fed back to the public and focus group participants.
Council information is also available in audio, braille, large print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a British Sign Language interpreter, please email us at: equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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