HEALTHIER OUTDOOR ADVERTISING:

Delivering Public Health and Commercial Value

Association for Public Service Excellence
Scottish Commercialisation, Income Generation and Social Value Network

Yvonne Traynor | Public Health Scotland | 18 November 2026

Public Health Scotland

Why focus on advertising?

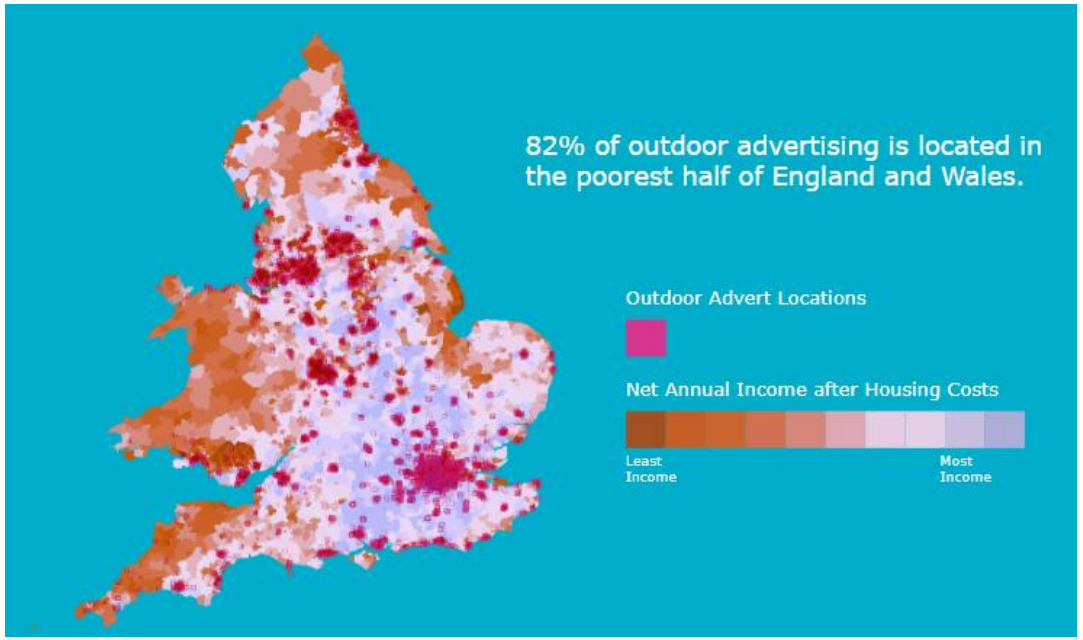
Adverts affect our choices

Children

Advertising can shape food preferences, purchasing requests and consumption. Repeated exposure can normalise less healthy products.

Inequalities

24% of measured Primary 1 children were at risk of overweight or obesity in 2024/25. Risk of obesity was twice as high in the most deprived areas.



Unavoidable Impact - Adfree Cities

Council controlled spaces provide an opportunity

HFSS advertising policy

HFSS advertising policy

A council policy that restricts advertising of food and drink high in fat, salt or sugar on specified advertising spaces the council owns or controls.

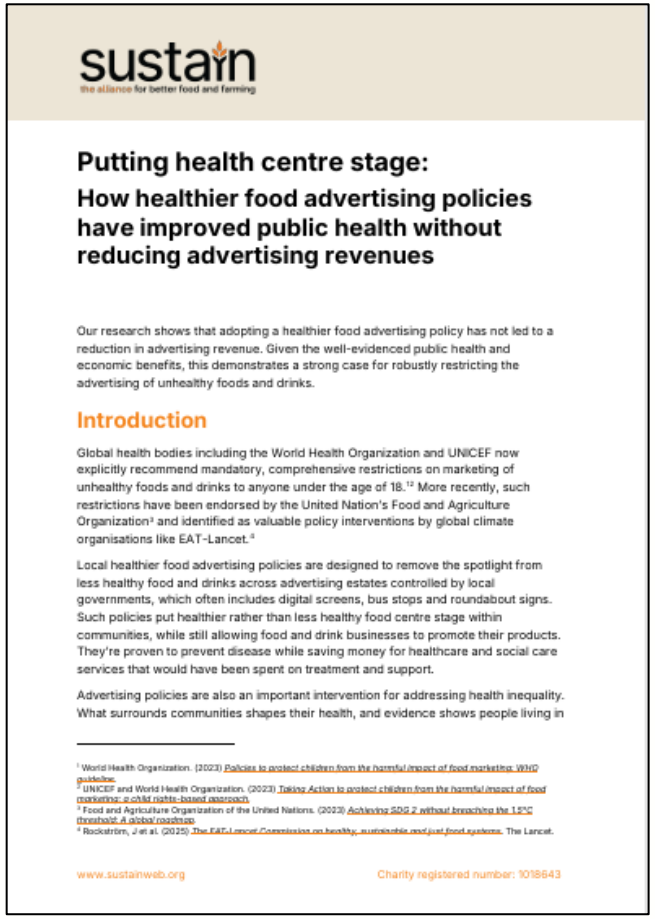


Destination Junk Free London bus. Credit: Sustain

Research found that Transport for London's advertising restrictions were associated with:

- **6.7% fewer calories purchased from HFSS products** per household per week than expected without the policy.
- This was equivalent to approximately **1,001 fewer kilocalories per household per week**.
- The largest reduction was for chocolate and confectionery, at **19.4%**. [lshtm.ac.uk]

What about advertising revenue?



sustain
the alliance for better food and farming

Putting health centre stage:

How healthier food advertising policies have improved public health without reducing advertising revenues

Our research shows that adopting a healthier food advertising policy has not led to a reduction in advertising revenue. Given the well-evidenced public health and economic benefits, this demonstrates a strong case for robustly restricting the advertising of unhealthy foods and drinks.

Introduction

Global health bodies including the World Health Organization and UNICEF now explicitly recommend mandatory, comprehensive restrictions on marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks to anyone under the age of 18.[1,2] More recently, such restrictions have been endorsed by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization[3] and identified as valuable policy interventions by global climate organisations like EAT-Lancet.[4]

Local healthier food advertising policies are designed to remove the spotlight from less healthy food and drinks across advertising estates controlled by local governments, which often includes digital screens, bus stops and roundabout signs. Such policies put healthier rather than less healthy food centre stage within communities, while still allowing food and drink businesses to promote their products. They're proven to prevent disease while saving money for healthcare and social care services that would have been spent on treatment and support.

Advertising policies are also an important intervention for addressing health inequality. What surrounds communities shapes their health, and evidence shows people living in

[1] World Health Organization. (2023) *Policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing: WHO guideline.*
[2] UNICEF and World Health Organization. (2023) *Taking Action to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing: a child rights-based approach.*
[3] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2023) *Achieving SDG 2 without breaching the 1.5°C threshold: A global roadmap.*
[4] Rockström, J et al. (2025) *The EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable and just food systems.* The Lancet.

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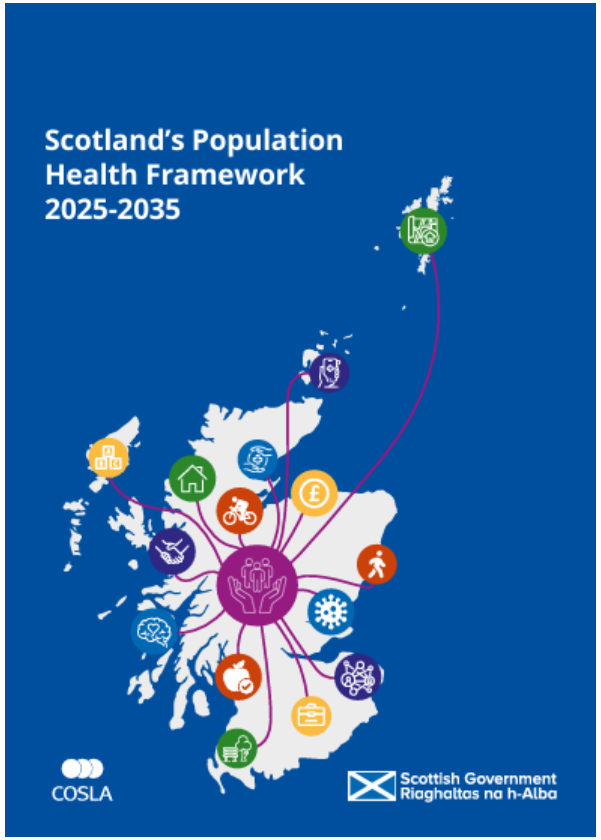
Key finding

No evidence of lost advertising revenue compared with councils without healthier food advertising policies.

[How healthier food advertising policies improve public health without reducing advertising revenues | Sustain]

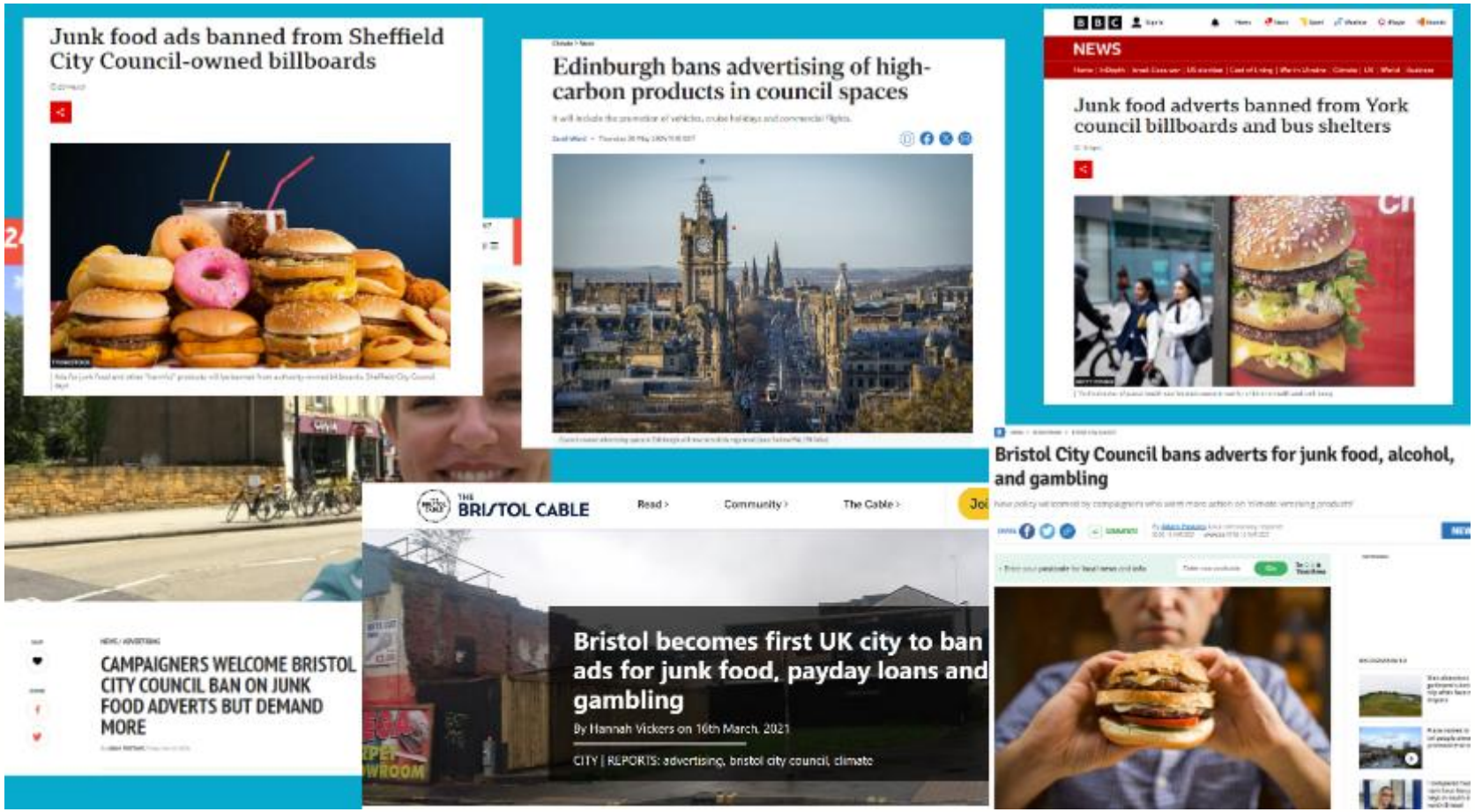
Why this should be a priority of local government?





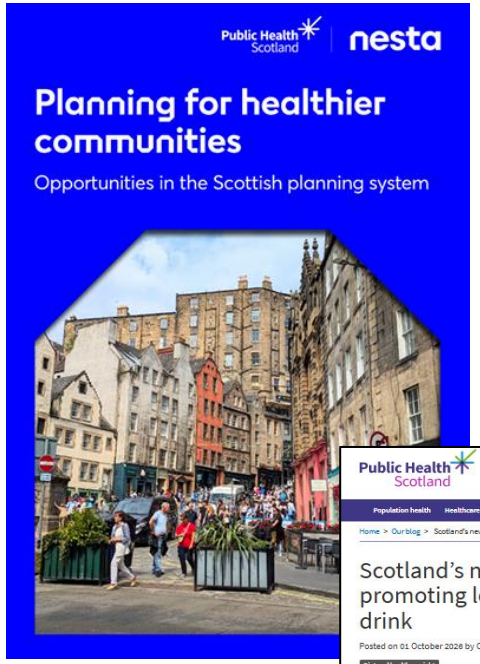
Opportunity to align commercial activity with wider council priorities

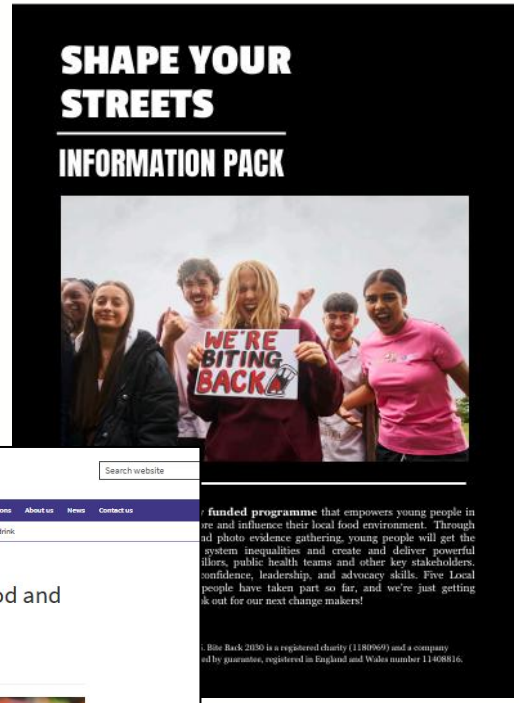
Local government action is growing

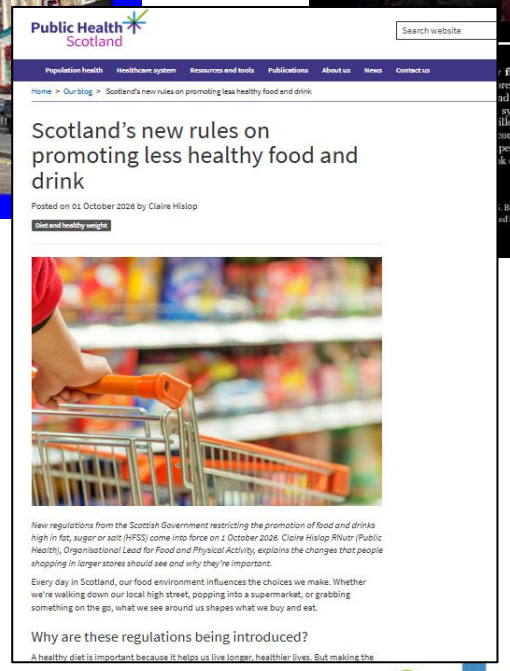


The big picture









Support and resources

- Peer support: PHS Scottish Healthier Advertising Community of Practice: Email phs.diet-and-healthyweight@phs.scot to join
- Sustain toolkit: Healthier food advertising policies
- PHS/Improvement Service: Elected Members Briefing - Marketing and promotion of Health Harming Commodities - what action can Local Government take?
- TfL Ad policy https://content.tfl.gov.uk/policy-guidance-food-and-drink-advertising.pdf
- TfL evaluation: Evaluation of the removal of 'junk-food' advertising in public transport networks
- Revenue Research: How healthier food advertising policies improve public health without reducing advertising revenues
- Adfree Cities
- BiteBack: Shape your Streets Scotland Information pack
- BMJ investigation: *Bans on junk food advertising in outdoor spaces derailed by industry lobbying* (2025)





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