

Report to: Income Management Sub-Committee, 1st February 2023

Report of: Deputy Director, Corporate Policy & Strategy

Subject: WEBSITE ADVERTISING

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Sub-Committee notes the content of this report.

2. Background

2.1 The proposal to introduce website advertising was developed as part of the Council's transformation plan that contained a range of projects and initiatives to increase income and reduce cost to achieve a balanced budget. The Council's budget for 2019/20 included an income of £3k from advertising revenue generated from the Council's website.

2.2 Income from advertising on Local Authority websites has been in place for over a decade and is now common practice. A list of Council's with advertisements on their websites is at **Appendix A**. This has been prepared from a search engine and is not exhaustive of all 333 Local Authorities. One of the early adopters was by Wrexham Council which has reportedly raised income of over £14k in a single year. [Adverts on council websites raise £34,500 to boost income - BBC News](#)

2.3 Following a delay during the pandemic, the Council implemented the Google AdSense service in October 2020.

2.4 This report gives information of the controls in place and the income generated since that time.

3. Information

3.1 Google AdSense automatically delivers adverts that are targeted to the publisher's content and audiences. It does this in several ways:

Contextual targeting – This uses technology factors such as keyword analysis, word frequency, font size and the overall link structure of the website in order to determine what a web page is about and precisely match Google Ads to each page.

Placement targeting - With placement targeting, advertisers choose specific ad placements or subsections of publisher websites, on which to run their ads. Ads that are placement-targeted may not be precisely related to the content of a page, but are hand-picked by advertisers who've determined a match between what the site's users are interested in and what they have to offer.

Personalised targeting - Personalised advertising enables advertisers to reach users based on their interests, demographics (e.g. "sports enthusiasts") and other criteria. To opt out of personalised advertising, users can change their controls in Google's Ads Settings

Run of Network targeting - Run of Network lets advertisers target all sites in the AdSense network, except excluded sites, according to the available inventory.

- 3.2 Visitors to the Council website will only see adverts if they first accept cookies. If they decline cookies, no adverts will appear. Cookie settings can be amended through the user's web browser at any time.
- 3.3 Not everyone will see the same adverts. They appear at different times and are also selected by Google AdSense in relation to the user's browsing history.
- 3.4 Adverts appear as a banner across the top and bottom of each page.
- 3.5 The system allows the Council to block particular categories of advert that are considered inappropriate. This mirrors our guidelines for advertising in the Council's City Life publication for residents. These include adverts for organisations that are political, relate to gambling, pornography or alcohol. We also do not permit adverts that might be detrimental to or in direct competition with Council services.
- 3.6 The Council has not received any formal complaints regarding the content of adverts.
- 3.7 A resident has raised a concern with the layout of a particular advert, via a Councillor. This related to the increasingly common practice of designing adverts to encourage users to click on a link without making it clear that the link is part of an advert. Officers have identified a handful of adverts with similar practice over the past year, all of which were immediately removed.
- 3.8 As the identification of adverts that adopt what might be considered "sharp practice" is subjective we are not able to block all of these before they appear but regular monitoring and the ability to respond quickly to concerns means that we are able to exclude them.
- 3.9 The Council has received approximately £3k over the last two calendar years, with almost £2k of that being generated in 2022.

Ward(s): All
Contact Officer: David Sutton
david.sutton@worcester.gov.uk
Background Papers: None

A selection of local authorities utilising website advertising.

1. Allerdale Borough Council
2. Argyll Bute Council
3. Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
4. Blaenau Gwent Council
5. Bromsgrove District Council
6. Cheltenham Borough Council
7. Croydon
8. Derbyshire Dales District Council
9. Ealing Council
10. East Hampshire District Council
11. Enfield Council
12. Halton Borough Council
13. Haringey Council
14. Havant Borough Council
15. Havering London Borough
16. The Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames
17. Lancashire County Council
18. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
19. Newcastle City Council
20. Milton Keynes Council
21. Monmouthshire County Council
22. North East Lincolnshire Council
23. North Lincolnshire Council
24. Northamptonshire County Council
25. London Borough of Redbridge
26. Redditch Borough Council
27. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
28. Sefton Council
29. South Gloucestershire Council
30. Sutton Council
31. City and County of Swansea
32. Tameside Metropolitan Council
33. Torbay Council
34. Torfaen County Borough
35. Vale of Glamorgan
36. Wakefield Council
37. Wandsworth Council
38. Wokingham Borough Council
39. Wrexham Council