

3.4.02 Noise

Introduction: why is this important?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that excessive noise seriously harms human health and interferes with people's daily activities at school, at work, at home and during leisure time. It can disturb sleep, cause cardiovascular and psycho physiological effects, reduce performance and provoke annoyance responses and changes in social behaviour. In addition, WHO have produced Guideline Values for Community Noise in Specific Environments such as inside dwelling, bedrooms, etc.

Nationally, incidences of complaints about noise have increased dramatically over the last 20 years. Noise can be a source of stress and anxiety for many people in their own homes. It is also a pollutant because it can seriously damage the quality of life and often the physical, psychological and social circumstances of those exposed to it.

Noise is now recognised as a serious Public Health issue and this is reflected by an indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework which is measured by the percentage of the population affected by noise.

What do the facts and figures tell us?

- Between 2011-12 and 2014-15 the number of complaints received by Bradford Council have reduced by 18%, from 2,890 in 2011-12 to 2,351 in 2014-15
- There is a significant increase in the numbers of complaints received during the months of July, August and September each year
- The majority of complaints relate to domestic noise sources. Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, 65% of noise complaints were alleged to be from a domestic source
- The complaint rate for Bradford District is lower than the average for England. Using the latest available PHOF data for 2014-15, Bradford's complaint rate was 4.5 per 1,000 population compared to the average for England of 7.1 per 1,000 population
- Formal enforcement activity is necessary to eliminate a statutory nuisance in approximately 50 cases each year

What strategies, policies and best practice have been developed locally and nationally?

Environmental Health responds to all of the complaints which it receives about noise. Where an investigation indicates that the noise amounts to a statutory nuisance, action is taken under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This requires Local Authorities to serve Abatement Notices to eliminate the nuisance, or reduce it to an acceptable level and failure to comply may result in legal proceedings.

Environmental Health Service operates an Emergency Call Out Service which will respond to defined incidents. Some types of noise complaints fall within those defined incidents. In addition the officers on the call out service also deliver a noise witnessing service. This is a service whereby specific noise cases have the option to contact an officer in order to have noise incidents witnessed outside of normal working hours.

Other national policies include:

- Noise Policy Statement for England – Defra, 2010
- National Planning Policy Framework – Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012

What challenges have been identified in a local context?

Bradford District has significant numbers of commercial and industrial outlets which are in close proximity to residential areas, increasing the likelihood of noise nuisance.

Domestic equipment such as Hi Fi's, televisions and computer equipment increasingly incorporate high powered speaker systems, which unwittingly may cause noise nuisance to neighbours.

What do our stakeholders tell us?

Customer surveys identify that in excess of 80% of our customers state that they are very or highly satisfied with our reactive enforcement services.

Our customers expect enforcement action to be taken in accordance with our Enforcement policy and expect the full suite of enforcement options to be given due consideration, including where appropriate, seizure of offending domestic noise equipment.

Our partners in West Yorkshire Police and InCommunities recognise the Environmental Health Service role in reducing noise nuisance and associated anti social behaviour. The liaison links are being strengthened through initiatives such as Information Sharing Agreements that facilitate rapid intelligence sharing.

Recommendations: What do we need to do? How do we ensure this remains a priority?

Prevention of noise pollution is always the preferred strategy and Environmental Health considers that the most effective means of noise management is to ensure that new developments are sited and designed in such a manner as to minimise the impact of noise and vibration. It is therefore important that noise and vibration issues are given due consideration during the planning process in line with national guidance. Environmental Health seeks to advise and influence the planning process to achieve these aims, providing advice on noise and vibration issues to the Bradford Council's Planning Department, and to applicants/prospective applicants.

It is essential that a proportionate and transparent enforcement strategy is maintained when contraventions of statutory requirements are identified. This will include the service of abatement notices and instigation of legal proceedings where necessary. In cases of severe domestic noise nuisance, seizure of the source of the noise is necessary.

References

Public Health Outcomes Framework, 2016-2019. <http://www.phoutcomes.info/>