

Noise:

Frequently Asked Questions

Environmental Protection Act 1990

What noises can the council investigate?

There is no definitive list but Environmental Services investigate a variety of noises from parties, music, bird scarers and barking dogs in both domestic and commercial settings. Certain noises would be referred to and or investigated in connection with the council's Crime and Disorder Unit if they are considered to be anti social. We cannot investigate noise from traffic on the highway, from aeroplanes flying overhead (including helicopters) or "normal living activities" ie – children playing or vehicles arriving and leaving.

Will the police investigate noise?

The police are often contacted about noise complaints. However, unless there are issues relating to crime and disorder and or criminal activity they will generally refer such matters to Environmental Services. The police have powers to deal with groups of people who are causing disturbance including noise eg raves.

Is there a fixed noise level above which the council can take action?

NO, there is no fixed noise level, time of day, frequency or duration defined in law. These ARE, however, taken into consideration in any investigation. The council can only take formal action if it is satisfied that the noise is causing a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

What is a Statutory Nuisance?

There is no set definition but case law has defined a Statutory Nuisance as a "material interference with the comfort and enjoyment of another's home."

What does this mean?

In practice, to be a Statutory Nuisance, the noise would have to be excessive and unreasonable in the circumstances and significantly interfere with the use and enjoyment of someone's home. Examples could be: disturbance of sleep, forcing you to close your windows, preventing you from using your garden etc due to the level, time, frequency and duration of the noise.

How does the council investigate complaints about noise?

Complaints are investigated under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Standard letters are sent to both parties, and the complainant is required to complete diary sheets to record when the noise occurs. Thereafter visits may be made by officers to determine whether or not a Statutory Nuisance is occurring. We would try to offer advice and assistance to the person who is alleged to be causing the noise of measures that could be taken to minimise the noise. Please note dictaphones can be made available as an alternative to completing monitoring forms on request.

What action could the council take?

If the council is satisfied that the noise is causing a Statutory Nuisance, a notice can be served which can stop the activity occurring.

What if I don't want to make a formal complaint?

Many situations can be resolved on informal basis, perhaps by speaking with your neighbour to discuss your concerns and trying to reach an agreement. Environmental Services are unable to investigate anonymous complaints under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, there is the option for any individual to take a private action under the same Act without any involvement by the council. We have produced a leaflet with some guidance on how to tackle your neighbour entitled "Direct Negotiation with a Neighbour".

How do I take a private Action?

1. Under section 82 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, any person may make a complaint directly to the Magistrates' Court on the grounds that they are aggrieved by a statutory nuisance.
2. You may take your own legal action for an injunction or damages in respect of private nuisance.

Environmental Services would advise contacting a Solicitor regarding private action. Please note that you would be responsible for any costs incurred by this course of action.