Neighbour Noise

Public Opinion Research to Assess its Nature, Extent and Significance

Research Study Conducted for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) by MORI Social Research Institute

October 2003
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Introduction

This report contains the findings of research undertaken by MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Background and Objectives

The aim of this report is to investigate the nature, extent and significance of neighbour noise, to feed into Defra’s programme of work towards a UK Noise Strategy. Questions for the research include:

- how widespread is neighbour noise?
- how does neighbour noise compare with other types of noise?
- under which circumstances is neighbour noise more of a problem?
- what are the characteristics and socio-economic profile of noise sufferers and noise makers?
- what makes some noises more annoying than others?
- are there social norms around making and hearing noise?
- what is the impact of neighbour and wider community relations?

Methodology

MORI undertook seven phases of research for this study:

1. Scoping phase

Before undertaking any original research, MORI undertook a scoping phase of previous noise studies. This was intended to:

- ensure that previous work, such as that undertaken by BRE, was included and built upon; and
- gather the views of key stakeholders, so that the research questions explored in this study reflect salient issues in developing a greater understanding of neighbour noise.

2. National quantitative survey


A total of 584 sampling points across England, Wales and Scotland were selected at random, with interviews undertaken according to quotas (age, gender and work status). All data have been weighted by these factors to ensure the study is representative of the known profile of the British population.
3. National qualitative research

The national qualitative research involved eight focus groups, each lasting around two hours, conducted between 21st-30th January 2003. Participants were selected according to specific criteria using a recruitment questionnaire (which can be found under separate cover). Recruitment was guided by:

- geographic factors – to reflect and compare different locations across England, Wales and Scotland;
- exposure to noise – all participants must have heard noise from neighbours while in their home;
- annoyance at noise – a mix of people who have been annoyed by neighbour noise to different degrees. This allowed an investigation of the reasons why some people are more or less annoyed by noise;
- housing density – to investigate the differences between high density housing (terraced housing and flats) and low density homes (detached and semi-detached houses/ bungalows);
- socio-demographic influences – to investigate noise according to factors such as ethnicity, age, and social class;
- inclusiveness – to ensure that the qualitative research did not exclude any perspectives on the grounds of gender, ethnicity or age. The research included rural areas as well as urban.

The group compositions were as follows:

**Cardiff:** White British, mix of men and women, aged 30-50, social class C1C2, high density housing, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;

**Banbury:** White British, mix of men and women, aged 30-50, social class ABC1, low density housing, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;

**Newham (London):** mix of White British and different minority ethnic communities, mix of men and women, aged 18-30, social class C2DE, high density housing, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;

**Newham (London):** mix of White British and different minority ethnic communities, mix of men and women, aged 50+, social class C2DE, high density housing, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;

**Leicester:** White British, mix of men/ women, aged 18-30, social class C1C2D, high density housing, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;

**Leicester:** Asian/ Asian British, mix of men/ women, aged 18-30, social class C1C2D, high density housing, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;

**Edinburgh:** White British, mix of men and women, aged 30-50, social class C1C2, low density housing, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;
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**Thirsk:** White British, mix of men and women, aged 30+, low density housing in a rural location, mix of those disturbed by noise to varying degrees;

The topic guide (used as an aide memoire by the moderator) was designed by MORI in conjunction with Defra, and can be found under separate cover.

Participants were asked to complete a noise diary in the week before attending the group, which ensured participants came to the discussion ready for the debate. It also ensured that participants were forced to consciously consider reactions to noise that are often sub-conscious. All participants were paid £40 as a ‘thank you’ for attending and completing the noise diary.

4. **Quantitative surveys in four specific areas**

Four specific areas were chosen to conduct follow-up research: Dundee, Greenwich, Lewisham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. These were selected on the basis that they represent high density, urban areas and so ‘risk’ areas for neighbour noise.

Sampling points within each area were chosen to reflect neighbourhoods where exposure to noise is greatest; urban areas within cities where there is a higher proportion of high-density homes (flats and terraced housing). To ensure that interviews were conducted in ‘like’ areas within each city, MOSAIC categories and scores on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) were analysed by MORI in order to match specific neighbourhoods across the four areas.

A total of 2,066 interviews were conducted in total with a minimum of 500 in each area. These were conducted face-to-face and in-home from 27th March – 30th April 2003 across 128 sampling points. Quotas were set on age, gender and work status to reflect the local populations, and the data have been weighted to ensure results are representative of the population within each area.

5. **Depth interviews with noise ‘makers’ and ‘sufferers’**

Thirty five depth interviews were conducted in total. This included 15 with noise sufferers who complained to the council or police, five who had thought about complaining but didn’t, and 15 with noise makers. Each interview was around 15-30 minutes and was conducted according to a loosely structured topic guide (found under separate cover). Interviews took place from 2nd June – 1st July 2003. Participants were paid £25 as a ‘thank you’ for taking part.

The details of noise sufferers were provided by the local authorities in each area. In Dundee, where the division of responsibility for noise disputes is different from that in England, this also included Tayside Police. In order to respect Data Protection Law, a strict ‘opt-in’ methodology for selecting participants was adopted. This involved each of the authorities writing to a sample of clients from their database asking if they would like to be included in the research. Those people willing to participate then contacted the council to give consent for their contact details to be passed on to MORI.
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Noise makers and those who have thought about complaining but didn’t were identified through the survey at phase four and re-contacted. Only those participants who had given consent for re-contact were approached, in accordance with Data Protection Law.

6. Depth interviews with key stakeholders

Five depth interviews were undertaken with local council and police representatives. This was not intended to be representative of all stakeholders, but rather to ensure that a selection of views were included that could be compared with the perceptions of noise sufferers and makers.

7. Communications expertise

As part of this research project, MORI was asked to produce some initial recommendations on a communications strategy to promote the findings to policymakers and enforcers, and target noise sufferers and noise makers.

MORI worked with Grant Riches Communication Consultants on this aspect of the project. MORI and Grant Riches have worked as partners on other pieces of national research, most notably the ODPM-sponsored “Connecting with Communities” project which produced an online good practice toolkit for local councils on communicating with local citizens.

Analysis

As part of the data analysis, three specific techniques have been utilised:

- Factor & Cluster analysis was conducted on the data to identify different ‘segments’ or groups within the population according to their attitudes and/or reaction to noise;
- MOSAIC has been used as an analysis tool because this allows the survey results to be examined by quite detailed housing types that add to the analysis beyond simple dwelling classifications;
- the analysis has also incorporated information available from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). This has allowed the results to be cross-referenced to the noise data, giving a more detailed picture of deprivation than simply assuming it is higher in particular areas; it also allows pockets of deprivation to be detected, for example in gentrified neighbourhoods or within otherwise affluent areas.

Interpretation of the Data

This report presents the findings of quantitative and qualitative research, which have been used as complementary research methodologies in this study. It is, therefore, important to note the differences between the two types of research and the conclusions we can reasonably draw from them.

The quantitative research provides ‘hard’ data that is statistically representative. From this it is possible to quantify observations and extrapolate findings to the
wider public, for example ‘one in three people are annoyed by noise from their neighbours’. Nevertheless, it should still be noted that a sample, not the entire population, has been interviewed. Therefore, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means not all differences are statistically significant. Analysis of statistical significance has been undertaken and the results discussed within the report refer to significant results. A guide to statistical reliability is appended.

The qualitative research is an interactive process between researcher and participants: it allows respondents’ attitudes and opinions to be explored in detail, and provides an insight into the key reasons underlying their views. However, discussion results are based only on a small cross-section of the public and so findings are illustrative and indicative, not statistically representative. It is not possible to quantify findings or suggest they reflect the attitudes of the wider public, and so these findings are attributed to the participants rather than the public.

Supporting documents
This report is supported by two supporting documents:

- quantitative materials, containing the questionnaires and full computer tables from both the national survey and the follow up case study areas;
- qualitative materials, including the topic guides, noise diary and transcripts from the group discussions and depth interviews, which were taped with participants’ permission and edited only to remove the names of participants and individuals mentioned in the discussions.

Acknowledgements
MORI would like to thank Caroline Season at Defra for her help in developing the project, topic guide and this report. We would also like to thank the key stakeholders who agreed to be involved in the research, along with Dundee City Council, Tayside Police, Greenwich Council, Lewisham Council, and Newcastle City Council for their invaluable help and support.

Publication of the Data
As with all our studies, these findings are subject to MORI’s standard Terms & Conditions of Contract. To protect Defra, any press release or publication of the findings of this survey requires the advance approval of MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.
Summary and Conclusions

Exposure and annoyance
- Many people – close to two in three (63%) – hear noise from their neighbours to some extent. Fewer are actually annoyed by it, although annoyance occurs among just fewer than half (46%) of those who hear noise, or close to one in three (29%) among the population as a whole;

- Neighbour noise is, therefore, a problem that can arise under certain circumstances and in specific ‘risk areas’. These risk factors include high density housing, rented accommodation (in both the social and private sectors), areas of deprivation, and urbanity. In contrast, the profile of those not concerned by neighbour noise is consistent with circumstances which would be expected to limit exposure, for example detached housing, high home ownership, and residence in rural/suburban locations in some of the least deprived areas nationally.

Neighbour noise in context
- It is evident that people interpret noise differently according to its source. For example, noise from traffic is perceived differently than noise from aircraft noise, and similarly noise from neighbours is a distinct category;

- While it is not as widespread as some noises (such as traffic), neighbour noise is one of the most annoying noises when it is heard. Similarly, noise from entertainment venues is limited to a relatively small number of people, but is considered particularly disturbing among those it does affect. Two reasons appear key in explaining this:
  - people appear to be able to develop a certain degree of immunity to noises from traffic and trains, whereas the irregularity and lack of utility from neighbour noise suggest this does not apply;
  - neighbour noise is considered synonymous with a lack of consideration. This ‘consideration’ factor is critical in understanding the dynamics of disputes and demonstrates the importance of the social context of noise as opposed to its purely physical attributes.

- Neighbour noise should be considered within the wider ‘liveability’ agenda. One in seven (14%) identify it as a problem that affects their quality of life, fewer than the ‘big’ liveability issues of litter, vandalism and graffiti but comparable to abandoned vehicles, street drinking and drug abuse. Among certain groups, such as residents in high density flats, it becomes one of the most significant quality of life issues;

- Noise disputes often involve a ‘package’ of problems with a neighbour (including litter, dog fouling and rubbish), with noise the focal point for these wider grievances. These need to be addressed concurrently.
Which noises?

- Loud music, shouting and banging are the most frequent causes of annoyance. 'One off' or infrequent events like barbeques or parties are considered less of a widespread problem, as is mowing the lawn;

- Certain noises vary in impact on different groups. For example, older people are much more bothered by fireworks, and residents in rural areas are more likely to highlight noise from cars, motorbikes and pets;

- The noise need not be a ‘stereotypical’ nuisance noise to cause a dispute. Because of their social context, fairly routine noises (such as vacuuming, washing or closing doors) can be considered inconsiderate if they go on for too long or occur late at night;

- Some noises are more disturbing than others when they have a wider social connotation; for example, the prominence of shouting and banging relates to its association with domestic violence and child abuse. Similarly, noise from young people reflects a general suspicion of young people and the fear that they will cause crime.

Community cohesion and neighbour relations

- The research suggests that community cohesion is a significant factor in neighbour disputes; where residents feel involved in the community they are more likely to share a willingness to intervene for the common good. Intervention based on shared expectations and support of neighbourhood social control has been defined as ‘social efficacy’. Examples include community groups which come together to articulate local concerns and lobby local authorities, or neighbours supporting each other informally in response to any ad hoc issues that arise;

- Direct relations between neighbours can also have a significant bearing on noise disputes. The research shows that people are less willing to extend tolerance to those they do not like or do not know, hence annoyance is more likely to result under these conditions. Furthermore, it is more likely that disputes will arise given that the initial complaint and reaction is likely to be more aggressive where relations are poor.

Thresholds of tolerance

- A proportion of noise disputes seem to be caused by one neighbour being more sensitive to noise or holding unrealistically high expectations, for example that they should never hear noise from their neighbours. However, this accounts for only one in five people across the population as a whole and only a minority of noise disputes, with other factors playing a more significant role;
The time of day when noise occurs is important, but any attempt to standardise certain ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ times appears problematic. While most people acknowledge there are certain times when noise is less acceptable, there is little or no agreement on what specific times these actually are. The cut-off point for acceptability of noise varies widely, with significant numbers of the population falling anywhere between 8pm and midnight.

Furthermore, a significant minority consider noise a problem at times other than the night, driven by the increasing heterogeneity of lifestyles and working patterns. Dialogue between neighbours to establish times of acceptability appears very effective in countering this problem, but remains the exception rather than the rule and requires very good neighbour relations as a pre-requisite.

Prior warning of a noise event (such as a party) can be significant in defusing any conflict between neighbours; three quarters agree that noise is more acceptable if neighbours are informed before hand. This is seen as an act of consideration on the part of the noise maker, nullifying the key issue behind annoyance which is a lack of consideration. It should be promoted as part of the ‘ideal’ protocol for people to follow if they know they may disturb their neighbours.

Thresholds of tolerance are strongly driven by lifestyles or ‘life stage’. The ability to empathise with a neighbour, most likely through a similar personal experience, increases tolerance to certain types of noise. For example, noise from a baby crying at night is less of an issue for someone who has children, but a source of annoyance for those who do not. This applies equally to the conflicting music tastes of younger and older generations, and influences the acceptability of noise at different times, since families with children are more likely to identify earlier times in the evening whereas single people identify later times.

Many participants suggest that housing be structured so that ‘like’ groups (e.g. families) live together. At the macro-level of the neighbourhood or estate this is clearly counter to government cohesion policies that seek to integrate (rather than segregate) different groups, for example younger and older generations. However, there may be application at the micro-scale, for example through vetting procedures and tenancy agreements for rental properties in both the social and private rented sectors.

Tenure

Noise sufferers tend to be in social rented accommodation while noise makers tend to be in either social rented or private rented accommodation;
Many noise sufferers feel that private-renting tenants do not care about their neighbours or the area given the short term nature of their stay. There is also resentment in areas of mixed tenure where there are different ‘rules’ depending on people’s tenure status;

There also appears to be a particular problem with private landlords who are perceived to not be interested in problems relating to their tenant.

**Noise makers**

- Roughly half of noise makers claim to be unaware they are making a noise that is causing a disturbance to their neighbours, and so communications and awareness raising initiatives could prove effective among this group;

- Among those who are aware they are causing noise, the key issue is right to make noise. In many cases this right is seen narrowly in terms of only one or two activities, such as children playing or an occasional house party. In such circumstances there is potential for compromise on the part of both neighbours, and so communications may again be effective;

- However, there remains a proportion of noise makers who consider they have the right to make any noise at any time, and are not sympathetic to their neighbours. Therefore direct communications appealing for greater consideration of others are unlikely to be effective.

**Noise complaints**

- Around one in ten people have made a complaint about neighbour noise. Taken as a proportion of those annoyed by noise, as many as two in five end up with a complaint;

- The majority of people who have complained about noise do so in person to the noise maker, with around one in four complaining to the police and one in five to the council. However, the avenue of complaint is dependent on several factors, most notably:
  - neighbour relations: good neighbour relations promotes informal resolution of disputes, whereas poor relations are more likely to lead to formal intervention;
  - age: young people are least likely to complain (in spite of greater exposure to noise), and when they do it is most likely to be handled informally. In contrast, older people are most likely to complain (in spite of less exposure to noise), and when they do over half are formal rather than to the neighbour making the noise.

- Complaints handled between neighbours are the most effective means of resolving a dispute; two in three are satisfied with the effectiveness of their complaint, compared with half of those who contact the council or police. Complaints made to private landlords are considered least effective;
Informal complaints are also preferred by noise makers. In the majority of cases where complaints are made informally, noise makers say they take significant steps to reduce the noise. However, where formal complaints are made to the council or police, none completely stop making the noise, and while many take 'some' steps, a significant minority either do nothing or actually make more noise;

The benefits to complaining informally are recognised by the public, but the evidence suggests as many as one in three would not be comfortable approaching their neighbours in practice. Reasons for not complaining informally include a desire to 'keep the peace' and 'avoid repercussions'. The evidence also suggests that where neighbour relations are poor, they can actually worsen further as a result of the complaint;

Noise complaints are rarely simple. By virtue of the social context, they are often complex, involving multiple grievances and 'packages' of problems. The evidence suggests confounding problems include basic liveability concerns, anti-social behaviour issues, environmental health problems, mental health concerns and domestic violence. This, therefore, requires a sophisticated and co-ordinated approach to the problem that effectively utilises and organises the plethora of council departments responsible for these various problems.

Priorities for noise services

The top priority from the public's perspective in a noise incident is time; both to the initial complaint and the time it takes to resolve the dispute. There is a strong sense, among noise sufferers and stakeholders alike, that the process is laborious and difficult, with repeated warnings but no satisfactory outcome;

Face-to-face contact with the council or police when the complaint is made, alongside feedback on what has been done about it, is desirable and can significantly improve client satisfaction with the service received;

There is widespread support for new powers of intervention, including fines and evictions, among noise sufferers and the general public. However, stakeholders stress the need for an impact assessment of any new legislation to ensure it is practicable, resourced and enforceable on the ground;

Housing policy is perceived to be central to the resolution of noise complaints. This includes better building regulations for new homes, regulation of internal fittings (e.g. carpets) within homes, satisfactory vetting procedures for prospective tenants and the enforcement of tenancy agreements that clearly set out the tenant's responsibilities;

There is very little awareness of local noise services, which is an area for immediate attention.
Implications for a communications campaign

There is great scope for a targeted and specific communications campaign to promote the findings to policymakers and enforcers in order to support best practice, highlight potential solutions for noise sufferers and promote behavioural change among noise makers. This could involve a range of methods including a media campaign, events, direct mail and provision of a range of standard materials via the Defra website which could be used and adapted by policymakers and enforcers, landlords, voluntary sector advice and mediation agencies, tenants’ groups, councillors, MPs and educational bodies.
1. Exposure and Annoyance

1.1 Exposure to neighbour noise

Many people hear noise from their neighbours. Irrespective of whether they find it annoying or not, close to two in three (63%) hear noise from their neighbours to some degree. In many cases it is infrequent and described only as ‘a little’ (30%) or ‘sometimes’ (18%). However, 15% hear noise from their neighbours on a ‘regular’ basis; 11% ‘often’ and four percent who hear it ‘much/all of the time’.

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Exposure to Noise from Neighbours

Q: Irrespective of whether you find them (the noises) disturbing/annoying or not, can you tell me to what extent, if any, you can hear neighbours at all when you are in your home?

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much/all of the time</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite often</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Base: 6,116 residents, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002-Jan 2003  
Source: MORI

Exposure to neighbour noise can occur anywhere and to anyone. However, while accepting this it is clear that some groups are predisposed to higher exposure by virtue of their personal circumstances. For example, exposure to neighbour noise varies significantly according to dwelling; around one in four of all people (27%) in medium/high rise flats hear neighbour noise regularly, compared to one in eight (13%) in semi-detached homes and just four percent of all people in detached homes:
### Exposure to Noise by Dwelling

**Q** Irrespective of whether you find them [the noises] disturbing/annoying or not, can you tell me to what extent, if any, you can hear noise from neighbours at all when you are in your home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dwelling Type</th>
<th>% Hear noise regularly (‘often’ + ‘much/all of the time’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detached house/bungalow</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-detached house/bungalow</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terraced (at the end)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terraced (in the middle)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-rise flat/flat in converted house</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium/high rise flat</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Base:** 6,116 residents, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002-Jan 2003  
**Source:** MORI

Other significant factors include:

- **age** – close to one in four young people (23%) aged 15-24 hear noise from neighbours regularly, compared to one in eight (12%) aged 55-64 and one in ten (nine percent) aged 65+;

- **income** – one in five people (19%) with a household income of less than £17,499 regularly hear noise from neighbours, in contrast to one in eight people (12%) with an income of £30,000+;

- **urbanity** – one in five people (19%) in city/town centres hears noise from neighbours regularly, in contrast to one in ten people (10%) in the countryside;

- **deprivation** – analysis of the noise data by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) reveals that exposure to noise is higher in wards which suffer from greater levels of deprivation, including the 10% most deprived wards in England.
1.2 Annoyance at neighbour noise

While many people are exposed to noise from their neighbours, fewer are actually annoyed by it. Taken as a proportion of the population as a whole, noise is considered a problem to some extent by close to one in three (29%). This comprises 15% who say ‘a little’, seven percent who say it is ‘moderately’ annoying and seven percent who say it is ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ annoying. Neighbour noise is, therefore, not an issue for 71% of the population.

![Chart showing annoyance at noise from neighbours]

Although representing a minority, taken as a proportion of those who hear noise, almost half (46%) are annoyed, showing that exposure to noise can in many cases lead to a noise dispute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All who hear noise from neighbours</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3,820)</td>
<td>(6,116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MORI
Furthermore, the fact that close to one in three people are bothered by neighbour noise to some degree demonstrates its potential to become a serious problem under certain circumstances and in specific ‘risk’ areas. Annoyance is closely linked to exposure; those groups who hear noise more are also more likely to be annoyed by it. For example, as many as half of residents in medium/high rise flats are bothered by neighbour noise, while around two in five residents in the social rented sector will also consider the issue significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>And to what extent are you personally bothered, annoyed or disturbed by noise from neighbours?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base: All respondents</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall average:</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dwelling:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detached house/ bungalow</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-detached house/ bungalow</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terraced (middle)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terraced (end)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-rise flat</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/ high rise flat</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre of a town/ city</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs of a town/ city</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edge of the countryside</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of the countryside</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing tenure:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rented</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council rented</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Association</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MORI

Furthermore, the pattern is even more stark in terms of serious noise disturbances where people are ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ annoyed by neighbour noise. For example, one in four residents (23%) in medium or high rise flats who hear neighbour noise are ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ annoyed by it, in contrast to one in twelve people (seven percent) in detached homes.
The only exception is young people, who are not as annoyed by neighbour noise as much as would be expected given that they are exposed more to noise than any other age group. Instead, levels of serious annoyance remain in line with other ages, which suggests young people have a higher tolerance to noise. However, it should still be noted that young people are just as likely to be noise sufferers as other ages.
2. Profiling the Population

Using factor and cluster analysis, five discrete groups or ‘segments’ within the population can be identified in respect of neighbour noise:

‘Not Concerned’ group – 70%
This largest cluster group encompasses those who either do not hear noise from their neighbours or who are not bothered when they do. Their profile is consistent with the types of circumstances which would mean that exposure to noise is limited. Respondents in this group are most likely to live in the countryside or in the suburbs of towns/cities. They are most likely to live in low density housing (detached or semi-detached house/bungalow). They tend to belong to social group ABC1 and are older (aged 55+). They are more likely to be home owners which they have bought outright. Analysis by IMD reveals that these households are among the least deprived in the country, while analysis by MOSAIC categorises these people as ‘high income families’.

‘Affected by noise from neighbours inside’ group – 15%
This second largest group are more concerned with noises made by neighbours inside the home. The profile of these residents is consistent with high density housing; they are more likely to live in a city or town centre and live in terraced housing or flats. They are more likely to belong to the social class group C1C2 and are often younger, aged 15-34. They are more likely to work with a household income in the region of £17,500 to £29,999 and live in areas of high deprivation, including the 10% most deprived wards in England. Analysis by MOSAIC categorises the households as ‘low rise council’, ‘council flats’ and ‘victorian low status’.

‘Affected by noise from neighbours outside’ group – 9%
This represents a smaller group who are bothered by noise made by neighbours outside the home. As well as the different sources of noise, the profile of residents is also quite different, sharing many of the characteristics of the ‘not concerned’ group. They are more likely to live in a detached or semi-detached house/bungalow, belong to the Social class group ABC1 and be older (45-54). They tend to be home owners who are buying their house on a mortgage. They are more likely to be higher earners, with household incomes of £30,000+. The households are more likely to be in the least deprived areas of the country, and MOSAIC categories them as more likely to be ‘high income families’.
‘Received a noise complaint’ group – 3%

This group have had repeated complaints made about them, including formal complaints made to the local authority and/or police. They are more likely to live in a terraced house or flat rented from a private or social landlord. They tend to be male (although not exclusively), aged 15-24 and belong to Social class DE with a low household income of less than £17,499. MOSAIC analysis reveals they are more likely to live in ‘low rise council’ accommodation, while IMD analysis reveals they are more likely to live in areas which suffer from higher levels of deprivation, including the 10% most deprived wards in England.

‘Made a noise complaint’ group – 3%

This group repeatedly complain about noises (mostly made indoors), both to their neighbours and/or formally. They are more likely to live in a social-rented flat and tend to be female, belong to Social group DE and aged 35–54.

The significance of the distinction between those who make noise complaints and those who receive them is that they are two relatively distinct groups. Although living in high density housing is a shared characteristic, those who complain tend to be female, living in social rented accommodation and slightly older; whereas those who receive complaints tend to be younger, male and living in either social or private rented accommodation.

The segments can be represented graphically:

---

**Population Segmentation**

- **High Annoyance**
  - **High**:
    - ‘Not concerned’ 70%
      - 55+ Age Group
      - Live in low density areas; low density housing
      - Social Group ABC1C2
      - House is owned outright
      - Least deprived areas
      - MOSAIC ‘high income families’
    - ‘Affected by noise from neighbours inside’ 15%
      - Live in Terraced house, mid/High rise flat
      - Social Group C1C2
      - HI £17,500 to £29,999
      - Higher levels of deprivation, including 10% most deprived wards
      - MOSAIC ‘low rise council’, ‘Cicero flats’ and ‘Victorian low status’
    - ‘Affected by noise from neighbours outside’ 6%
      - Detached home
      - Social Group ABC1C2
      - HI £30,000+
      - 45-54 Age Groups
      - Least deprived areas
      - MOSAIC ‘high income families’
    - ‘Received noise complaint’ 3%
      - Male
      - Social Group DE
      - 15-24 Age Groups
      - Rent from Private Landlord
      - Terraced
      - Higher levels of deprivation
  - **Low**:

- **Low Annoyance**

---

**Base:** 6,116 adults, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003

**Source:** MORI
3. Neighbour Noise in Context

Neighbour noise is not an issue that exists in isolation. Rather, there are strong associations with other concerns, most obviously in terms of other forms of noise disturbance (traffic, entertainment venues), and also with local quality of life issues, the ‘liveability’ of the local area and the anti-social behaviour agenda.

3.1 Neighbour noise in the context of other noises

An important consideration for assessing the significance of neighbour noise is how it compares to other types of noise. In terms of exposure, neighbour noise is relatively widespread, particularly noise made by neighbours outside. Nevertheless, it remains below exposure to noise from traffic and comparable with noise from aircraft. Noise from pubs, clubs and entertainment venues is only heard by around one in ten people and represents one of the least widespread noises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: MORI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours (outside)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft/airports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours (inside)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trains/railway stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial building, construction, demolition, or road works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pubs/clubs/ent. venues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 6,116 residents, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002-Jan 2003 Source: MORI

However, in terms of how annoying each noise is to those who do hear them, noise from neighbours - particularly those made inside the home - is the most annoying noise; 12% are either ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ annoyed by neighbour noise made inside. In contrast, the most widespread noise – traffic – is not as annoying (7%). Of note, even though there are relatively few people who hear noise from pubs, clubs and entertainment venues, it is nonetheless more likely than many other noises to be annoying for those who are exposed to it (11%).
Annoyance of Neighbour Noise versus Ambient Noise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noise Source</th>
<th>% Extremely/Very Annoyed by Noise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours (inside)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pubs/clubs/ent. venues</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours (outside)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road traffic</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial activities</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial building, construction, demolition, or road works</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft/airports</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trains/railways stations</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who can hear noise from each source, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face and in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003

3.2 Why is neighbour noise more annoying?

While fewer people are affected by it, there appears something about neighbour noise that makes it more annoying to those who do hear it than other sources of noise. Indeed, there is acknowledgement in the qualitative research that hearing different noises does not bring about one uniform response; rather there are different reactions to each:

That is a different type of noise [from traffic] to feeling that something might happen through a fight or children crossing the street. It makes you more anxious than annoyed

Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

People definitely respond differently to road noise as opposed to rail noise. People accept road and rail noise more. They don’t like aircraft noise, and there are definitely different perceptions about neighbour noise

Stakeholder

The research highlights the significance of two factors in particular that appear to make neighbour noise more annoying where it is heard:

people can develop ‘immunity’ to ambient noise - the focus group discussions suggest that there are some noises, including traffic and trains, that it is possible to establish some immunity, and which subsequently become only part of the ‘background’ noise:
We used to live near a main road. I hadn't realised there was a motorway and trucks all hours of the night until I moved and it was totally quiet. I'd learned to live with it

Asian male, 18-30, Leicester

I have a railway line behind mine and you can hear trains rumbling past. But you just hear it in the back ground

Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

I think subconsciously you departmentalise what noises you expect and which you don't. I live quite close to the railway track and if anyone comes to the flat they say 'how on earth do you put up with those trains', but I don't even notice it

Male, 30-50, Banbury

Important factors that seem to make immunity more likely are regularity and utility (that is, there is a purpose to the noise):

You only notice it because you are not used to it. If you are not expecting noise then personally that has a much greater impact on you. If noises are regular and part of your routine you can ignore it

Male, 30-50, Banbury

You wouldn't ring up the police and say 'sorry your siren is making a noise'. You accept it, you can't control that

Male, 18-30, Leicester

You do get noises that can't be helped, like the milkman coming round early. Things like that wake you up but they are only doing their job

Female, 30+, Thirsk

**lack of consideration** - neighbour noise is largely seen as a controllable noise, and the fact that it occurs is taken as a lack of respect for other people. This perceived lack of consideration is a key factor in understanding why people become annoyed with neighbour noise; the context behind the noise (in a social sense) can be more significant than the physical characteristics of the noise itself (such as pitch, tone or volume):

Noise itself can often be controlled, but sometimes lack of consideration by certain sections of the public creates situations which are totally unacceptable

Female, 30+, Thirsk
Trains, planes and motorways are uncontrollable noises. To me, controllable noise is people arguing and slamming doors and not thinking. It is the thoughtlessness that bothers me, not necessarily the noise.

Male, 30-50, Banbury

When I stay with my girlfriend in Fulham the only plane I actually hear is Concorde. However, the girl downstairs turns her stereo on which is no louder than a normal plane but that really annoys me because it is inconsiderate.

Male, 30-50, Banbury

3.3 Neighbour noise as a ‘quality of life’ issue

The significance of neighbour noise is such that it should be seen as part of the wider ‘liveability’ agenda for the local neighbourhood; across the four case study areas, one in seven (14%) identify it as something that affects their quality of life. While it is less widespread than the current ‘big’ liveability issues of litter (33%), dog fouling (27%), graffiti (21%) and vandalism (20%), it is comparable to abandoned vehicles (17%), street drinking (13%), and drug abuse (nine percent).

As has already been noted, neighbour noise problems are particularly acute among certain groups. For example, among residents dissatisfied with their home, it is the second biggest problem with their quality of life (43%). Similarly, it is the second biggest quality of life issue among residents in medium/high rise flats (26%). This highlights the specific nature of the problem and the targeted policies required.
Noise as a Quality of Life Issue
- Residents dissatisfied with their home

Q Which of the following, if any, do you consider to be problems in the area that affect your quality of life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Litter and Rubbish</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise from neighbours</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog fouling</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people/children misbehaving</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People drinking/drunk in the street</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse/dealers</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise from traffic</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned vehicles</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graffiti</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with neighbours in general</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 128 residents dissatisfied with their home, 16+, face-to-face and in-home, Dundee, Greenwich, Lewisham and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 27 March-30 April 2003

Noise sufferers clearly consider neighbour noise a serious quality of life issue:

Well it was a major, major thing and it causes problems in relationships, problems in work

Noise sufferer

It really did impinge on my life, I was nearly having a nervous breakdown at the time. Noise that regularly, for those hours, was horrendous

Noise sufferer

The qualitative research also supports the idea that neighbour noise does not occur in isolation, but rather as part of a ‘package’ of problems with neighbours, often including problems with rubbish, dog fouling and litter. It is also significant that among this package of problems, noise is often considered as a focal point for wider neighbour grievances:

He slams his fists on the walls and doors and doesn’t wash the stairs, doesn’t take the bins out. But it is not as important as the noise and not being able to sleep at night

Noise sufferer

The smell is disgusting, there is no rubbish being put out. Two tenants left, the house was always being vandalised

Noise sufferer

It’s just total ignorance and non-caring about other people. She had a dog and she would just open the door in the morning and let it shit on the pavement

Noise sufferer
4. Types of Noise

4.1 Which noises?

Noises made by neighbours inside their home appear most significant. Loud music (excluding parties) and shouting/arguments are the most widespread causes of disturbance (38% and 38% respectively). These are closely followed by banging/loud noises (34%) and children/young people (29%).

Noises made by neighbours outside, but affecting those inside, are less of a problem, although pets/animals (16%), cars/motorbikes (16%) and car/house alarms (14%) remain significant. Furthermore, fireworks also impact on a number of people (14%). Perhaps surprisingly, single events such as parties/barbeques are not as widespread a problem (12%), nor is gardening/mowing the lawn (six percent).

One thing that is evident among some noise sufferers is that not all noises have to be particularly loud or ‘stereotypical’ nuisance noises to be considered a problem. Several disputes were not based on volume but on ‘normal’ activities like shutting doors or having meetings which became a problem at certain times or when taken to excess:

It wasn’t as if all those noises were really annoying or anything you would think of as being antisocial. They weren’t really party noises or anything

Noise sufferer
If there was loud music playing they would turn it down a bit, but it wasn’t the major issue. A lot of it was like delivery people and taxis knocking and beeping their horns at 3am in the morning.

Noise sufferer

Maybe ten people go into her house and for a while there is silence. Then they have a break and it is chat chat chat, and then from 1am, 2am or 3am there is people going and hanging doors. There is no music—[if there was] I’d be on a winner [with my complaint].

Noise sufferer

4.2 Variations among different groups

The focus group research suggests that problem noises vary considerably according to local circumstances. For example, all participants in Cardiff report motorcycles as a significant problem, whereas elsewhere they are not mentioned and other noises appear more prominent:

Car alarms are a complete nuisance around our area—in the middle of the night they are going off constantly.

Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

What particularly annoys me—we have a load of it—is motorcycles.

Male, 30-50, Cardiff

It is a rural area so natural noises—farm noises, tractors, animals.

Female, 30+, Thirsk

The quantitative research also demonstrates variations among the public according to location or socio-demographic factors. For example, noise from fireworks is more of a problem among older people aged 65+ (21%) compared to young people aged 15-24 (8%). Types of nuisance noises also vary according to housing type. Problems with loud music and shouting/arguments are more common for people living in flats than those in detached houses, who are more concerned than others with noises from pets and cars/motorbikes.
4.3 The social context of noise

The extent to which noises disturb or bother people often depends on the context of the noise and the association between noise and a range of other issues, again highlighting the significance of social issues over the purely physical attributes of noise. For example, to some participants the annoyance caused by noise from motorbikes has as much to do with the association it has with child safety on the roads than it does with the actual aggravation from the noise itself:

The noise from motorbikes is horrendous. And also the children, it is a very, very worrying problem

Male, 30-50, Cardiff

Similarly, loud banging noises involving arguments are particularly disturbing noises because of the association with child abuse or domestic violence:

It’s when they start shouting at each other and the kids. You want to step in to stop someone getting hurt, but you can’t really do anything

Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

Sometimes I hear banging and stuff and you don’t know what is going on. There are children in the house and you don’t know if there is any violence going on

Male, 30-50, Banbury

Another powerful association is with personal safety and anti-social behaviour, which explains why noise from young people has such an impact on others, particularly older people:
Really it is the shouting and swearing [that bothers me]
Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

It is ok until it becomes anti-social, that is when it becomes a problem. It sounded dangerous
Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

I think it is more aggressive now, I don’t think it is necessarily noisier. Kids have always been noisy
Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

The implication for noise professionals is that while the noise itself is obviously part of the problem, the dispute often reflects wider grievances between neighbours or in the wider community which simply abating the noise at a particular time will not necessarily remedy. The complexity of some cases requires concurrent action on other issues and a sophisticated approach to assess the problem and identify confounding issues.
5. Community Cohesion & Neighbour Relations

While the simple link between exposure to neighbour noise and annoyance is compelling, that is not to say it fully explains the relationship between hearing noise and the likelihood of being disturbed by it. The research suggests that the impact of both community cohesion and direct neighbour relations plays a significant role in shaping the context of neighbour noise issues and influencing the nature of any dispute that follows.

5.1 Community cohesion

The term ‘community cohesion’ is an umbrella term referring to how involved residents feel in the community, how friendly they think their neighbourhood is and how much people look out for one another. It is often synonymous with ideas of ‘sustainable communities’ and ‘social capital’.

The evidence supports the assertion that ‘stronger’ communities are less likely to experience neighbour noise problems. For example, analysis of the experience of residents in both London and the North East reveal that they are equally likely to hear noises made by neighbours inside their home (54%), in both cases more so than other areas of the country. Furthermore, in both areas 12% report hearing noise ‘often’ or ‘much/ all of the time’.

![Exposure to Neighbour Noise: London and the North East](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>London</strong></td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North East</strong></td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MORI

However, while London follows the general trend of more exposure leading to greater annoyance, this appears not to be the case in the North East, where levels of annoyance are in fact among the lowest of the regions. It should be noted that the base sizes for both areas is small, although the difference between them remains statistically significant.
Annoyed by Neighbour Noise: London and the North East

Q  And to what extent are you personally bothered, annoyed or disturbed by the noise from neighbours inside their home you say you can hear in your home?

% Annoyed, bothered or disturbed by neighbour noise made inside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% Annoyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 381 residents in London and 142 residents in the North East who are bothered by neighbour noise made inside, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002-Jan 2003

The follow up surveys in two London boroughs, Newcastle and Dundee confirms that community cohesion appears stronger in the latter two areas. Net figures (% agree minus % disagree) of +49 percentage points in Dundee and +45 in Newcastle compare with +37 in Greenwich and +30 in Lewisham. This is true in the neighbourhoods in Newcastle surveyed, even with the consideration of a much younger population (which would be expected to record lower community cohesion since young people are consistently less likely to say they feel involved).

Community Cohesion

Q  To what extent do you agree or disagree that this area is a place where people look out for one another...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>Net +/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dundee</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>+49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>+45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwich</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>+37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewisham</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>+30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 2,066 residents, 16+, face-to-face and in-home, Dundee, Greenwich, Lewisham and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 27 March-30 April 2003

While it is not possible to say that stronger community cohesion in the North East is the causal factor behind lower noise complaints, the association highlights its potential for mediating neighbour disputes. It appears to do this by providing a ‘buffer’ to noise disputes and improving wider satisfaction with the area.
Where there is a strong sense of community - for example where there is a feeling that ‘people look out for one another’ or ‘people feel involved in the community’ - exposure to noise is less likely to lead to annoyance. Just over one in three residents (36%) who don’t feel people look out for one another are annoyed by noise, compared to 15% among those who think that people do look out for one another. Again, while it is not possible to ascribe causality, the association demonstrates that neighbour noise needs to be considered within a much wider policy framework that recognises the social fabric of the neighbourhood.

| Impact of Community Cohesion on Neighbour Noise |
| Q And to what extent are you personally bothered, annoyed or disturbed by the noise you say you can hear from your neighbours? |
| % Not at all annoyed | % Fairly/very annoyed |
| People look out for each other | 61% | 15% |
| People don’t look out for each other | 34% | 36% |

Base: 2,066 residents, 16+, face-to-face and in-home, Dundee, Greenwich, Lewisham and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 27 March-30 April 2003

Community groups, whether formal or informal, can play a significant role in dealing with neighbour noise. There are examples of local tenancy groups taking up individual complaints and bringing them to the attention of the council. Similarly, depth interviews with noise sufferers also reveal some examples of neighbours acting together to mediate a dispute:

A s soon as there was enough people who wrote their names down on petitions the Council evicted those people to make life easier for everybody else

Male, 30+, Thirsk

All neighbours signed a petition against one family. The children were playing football and my house was the goal. When I asked them to move away they ignored me, so the neighbours actually asked them, in my name, to move away

Noise sufferer

Our [council] tenants group have dealt with noise issues. It is a good way of coming together and making the council listen to us

Female, 50+, London
In other examples, a lack of community cohesion results in a breakdown of collective action and places the onus on individuals to take noise complaints forward alone:

He is not backing me up and it is hard to get people to go to court with back up stories. It is a bit selfish of them.

Noise sufferer

They won't back me up. I think they're frightened they'll have to go to court or whatever

Noise sufferer

The impact of community cohesion on ‘civic responsibility’ or collective action is something that is acknowledged in research literature in the US. Samuels1 (2001) notes that where people mistrust one another they are unlikely to take action against anti-social behaviour or crime. In contrast, where there is cohesion and mutual trust among neighbours, the likelihood is greater they will share a willingness to intervene for the common good. The link of cohesion and trust with shared expectations for intervening in support of neighbourhood social control has been termed ‘collective efficacy’.

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5.2 Influence of neighbour relations

Following on from the wider social cohesion of an area, direct relations between neighbours can have a significant bearing on whether a noise is considered annoying. The research demonstrates that where relations are poor or not well developed it is likely that (a) annoyance will result, (b) disputes between neighbours will arise, and furthermore (c) these will be more difficult to resolve.

For example, among those who hear noise from their neighbours with good relations, 21% are ‘very/ extremely’ bothered by it. Where relations are poor, the proportion doubles to 40%.

The qualitative groups support this finding; there is acknowledgement that the reaction to noise from a friendly neighbour would be very different to that where relations were poor:

I think that if you get on well with a neighbour and they are having a party then you accept it, whereas if you didn’t get on with them you would be round straight away

Male, 30+, Thirsk

The other side are very good neighbours. They are very noisy, they come in at night and batter the doors and bang about, but I can cope with that. They [other neighbours who are the subject of complaint] are actually quieter

Noise sufferer

The other side I have a wonderful family. While he plays loud music sometimes, I am too ashamed to go and ask them to turn it down because otherwise they are good neighbours. So I decided I can put up with it

Noise sufferer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence of neighbour relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q And to what extent are you personally bothered, annoyed or disturbed by the noise from neighbours inside their home you say you can hear in your home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all/a little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very/extremely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 3,280 residents who can hear noise from their neighbours, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003

Source: MORI
When I finished work at 8am on a Sunday I would be as quiet as possible, and the same, they saw me coming back and wouldn’t put their music on loud. It just boils down to consideration for your neighbours.

Male, 30+, Thirsk

If you didn’t know them or didn’t like them, you would feel more confrontational if you went to see them about it.

Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

The groups also emphasise the extent to which the “consideration factor” is central to neighbour disputes. It sets the thresholds of tolerance since people make judgements about what is acceptable based on what they would do in a given situation:

I think you tend to judge others by how you bring up your children as well, don’t you.

Female, 30-50, Cardiff

We weren’t brought up to slam doors. We were brought up to have consideration for your neighbours.

Noise sufferer who did not complain

A lot of it is trying to be a wee bit considerate. Trying to treat people the way you would like to be treated as well.

Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

I am a dog owner, but if he starts barking then he immediately comes indoors, not like her next door.

Female, 30+, Thirsk

Neighbour relations also impacts on the likelihood of people making a complaint. Where relations are poor, levels of complaints are high; 70% of those annoyed by noise complain, mostly to the council or police (see section 9.2). However, among neighbours with good relations, only 40% of those annoyed by neighbour noise make a complaint, and it is more likely to be to the neighbour concerned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence of Neighbour Relations on Levels of Complaints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q: <em>Have you ever complained about a noise issue caused by a neighbour?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good relations</th>
<th>Poor relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td><strong>40%</strong></td>
<td><strong>70%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 926 residents with ‘good’ relations with neighbours and 134 residents with ‘poor’ relations with neighbours, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003  
Source: MORI
6. Thresholds of Tolerance

6.1 Is noise intolerance the problem?

The majority of people (88%) believe they are tolerant of noise, while 11% admit they are not.

There appears to be some truth in the assertion that noise disputes occur because some people are less tolerant to noise. In the four case study areas, the profile of those who complain about noise reveals they are more likely to include noise intolerant people than those who don’t; 23% who complained to a neighbour and 18% of those who complained about a neighbour say they are noise intolerant, compared with 10% among those who have never thought about complaining.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Complained to neighbour</th>
<th>Complained about neighbour</th>
<th>Thought about but didn’t</th>
<th>Not thought about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base: 2,066 residents, Dundee, Greenwich, Lewisham, Newcastle, (204)</td>
<td>(153)</td>
<td>(104)</td>
<td>(1,650)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very tolerant</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly tolerant</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very tolerant</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all tolerant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MORI
Furthermore, it is clear that there is a lack of consensus about how much neighbour noise people should be expected to accept. As many as one in five (19%) think they should hear no noise from neighbours, compared to over half (59%) who think people have to expect a certain degree of noise. Significantly, this divide in opinion is equally evident in high density urban areas as it is in rural locations, increasing the likelihood that expectations will not be met in reality.

![Expectations about Hearing Noise from Neighbours](source)

However, different levels of tolerance - evident though they are - are not powerful enough to account for all noise disputes; for example, four in five people who complain consider themselves noise tolerant. Furthermore, there appears a consensus among noise stakeholders that intolerance per se only accounts for a minority of cases:

> Some people do have the most amazingly ridiculous expectations. It is very small minority let me say - the majority of our customers have got genuine problems with their neighbours - but you do want to shout at them ‘for god’s sake go and live in the middle of a field’

**Stakeholder**

Therefore, other influences clearly play a significant role. These are now discussed in turn.
6.2 Impact of time of day

There is a broad consensus that noise is only unacceptable at certain times of the day; two in three (67%) agree with this statement.

![Pie chart showing the percentage of people who agree or disagree that noise is only unacceptable at certain times, for example late at night or early in the morning.]

However, there is a considerable difference in opinion about what actually is an ‘acceptable’ time in the evening. For example, one in ten (11%) think before 9pm is a reasonable time to expect noise to stop at the weekend. However, close to one in five (18%) think noise is acceptable up until 10pm, 20% up until 11pm and 17% up until midnight.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of people who think it is acceptable to make noise up until at the weekend, to the nearest 30 minutes.]

Source: MORI
There is more agreement during week nights, but even here there is a relatively wide variation between those who think noise is unacceptable past 9pm (32%) and those who, for example, think 11pm is the cut-off point (18%). The time period in between these differing expectations is likely to be when noise disputes occur, with both parties considering themselves ‘reasonable’ and their neighbours ‘unreasonable’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Acceptable (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 9pm</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9pm</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30pm</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10pm</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30pm</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11pm</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.30pm</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (midnight)</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30pm</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1am</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.30am</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2am</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 3,173 residents, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003  
Source: MORI

To add to the complexity of the problem, a significant minority (19%) disagree with the basic premise that there are standardised ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ times to make noise. This was evident in the qualitative discussions, with a recognition of an increasing diversity of lifestyles and working patterns:

But if you do shift work it’s different. Because 10am to me is like 1am to you lot

Male, 30-50, Cardiff

I have got a friend who works shifts. When she had only been in bed an hour the neighbours were having double glazing fitted. And they didn’t even have the decency to tell her, knowing she works shifts

Female, 30-50, Cardiff

People live at different times now. I get up at 7am and got to bed at 11pm. But you have got some people who get up at 10am and go to bed at 2am. A t week end some people work, and it also depends on if you have children

Female, 30-50, Edinburgh
There were some examples of situations where neighbours base ‘acceptable’ times on the working patterns of neighbours whatever they are. In this flexible approach, neighbours inform each other when is a good and bad time to make noise, and appears very successful in the examples given below. However, this presupposes good neighbour relations, and even then in many cases it is still seen as a lifestyle choice for someone to work ‘different’ hours outside of 9am-5pm and so not reasonable to expect neighbours to make allowances:

I think you should be consulted with your neighbours, what time you think the building work is acceptable to you
Female, 30-50, Cardiff

The neighbours I have got are pretty good. The fellow next door, I used to work with him, and if he is going to cut the grass he will wait until 12, which is when I am getting up
Male, 30-50, Cardiff

This gentleman made the point that he used to work shifts and his neighbour would ask him what shift he was on
Female, 30+, Thirsk

[making noise at] tea-time? sorry, that is bad luck
Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

6.3 Awareness and warning

Close to three quarters of people (74%) agree that people are entitled to make noise provided they ask permission or let neighbours know beforehand. Therefore, the significance of dialogue between neighbours is once again evident.
Taking the time to inform a neighbour about a possible noise reduces one of the main triggers behind annoyance at neighbour noise; lack of consideration (see section 3.2). It also reduces the irregularity and surprise of the noise, which again helps mediate against the likelihood of noise causing annoyance:

It feels good to know that someone has come to let you know. You can anticipate and plan the evening or your day.

Asian male, 18-30, Leicester

There is a young lad who owns the property next to me and he comes and knocks on the door and says ‘I am going to have a party Saturday night’. He tells me in advance and that is considerate, so I don’t mind for one night.

Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

It means they are actually thinking about their neighbours.

Female, 30-50, Banbury

6.4 Influence of ‘life stage’

The qualitative research suggests that a further influence on tolerance is experience. Where a neighbour can relate to a neighbour’s situation, they understand the noise and do not see it as a lack of consideration. This is to a large extent determined by life stage. For example, parents with children are more understanding of noise made by their neighbour’s children compared to single people or older people, who have little or no ‘reference’ point to understand this type of noise:

They never complain [about the noise from my children] because they have kids as well and they know there’s nothing you can do with little kids.

Asian female, 18-30, Leicester

Now I am more tolerant, because the neighbours are being more tolerant towards me when my child is crying in the middle of the night. It is a two-way thing.

Asian male, 18-30, Leicester

I can’t stand kids crying, it goes right in my head, it’s like someone sticking a screwdriver in there. You are like ‘I’m going to kill that kid in a minute’.

Male, 18-30, Leicester

My son was learning to walk and he fell over, as kids do. Now it wouldn’t sound like anything but to her [neighbour living below] she said it sounded like thunder. She ended up moving and swore it was because of me and my son.

Female, 18-30, Leicester
Neighbour Noise

I think it was a lack of experience on their part about how noisy kids can be - there's only so much you can do

Noise maker

The same applies in terms of the music tastes and lifestyles of young people, which is clearly different from that of older generations. This is one reason why parties are not as annoying for young people as other noises, since the music style is familiar and it is considered a 'normal' social activity: In contrast, modern music popular among younger ages – particularly the greater emphasis on base – is unfamiliar to older generations:

Young people don't mind noise from parties. But the older you get, like my parents age, 'oh, they are having a party, it's too loud, turn it down'. It just seems there's like a relationship between age and how loud noise is

Male, 18-30, Leicester

Perhaps I am old fashioned because I don't like their booming music. I am a fifties, sixties, seventies man, and their stuff is like one continuous beat

Male, 30+, Thirsk

I am 54 next month. I like 60s music. The music they like is beat, beat, beat, it is like a sort of hammering

Noise sufferer

A lot of people seem to like this blaring music with the bass going all the time and it goes right through me

Noise sufferer

Similarly, empathy to a particular religious or cultural background means that certain noises are reassuring to some communities and less so to others:

If you have an affinity to the noise you will like it, for example you would like to hear the noise from the mosque

Asian male, 18-30, Leicester

You get a lot of noise from the Mosque [complaint]

White female, 18-30, Leicester

This is supported in the quantitative information about what times are acceptable to make noise. For example, those with children in the household are more likely to identify earlier times in the evening as the time to stop making noise (41% say before 9pm compared with 26% of people with no children in the household). Similarly, younger people are just as conservative as other ages during the week, but more accepting of noise later at the weekend; only 45% say noise is only acceptable before 11pm, compared with 55% among those aged 35-44.
This leads some participants to suggest that there should be better planning of communities so that ‘like’ groups of people (for example families with children) live together and away from groups with whom they have less empathy or similarity:

I wrote a letter to the council asking them why they don’t try and house all the older people in the same area and keep the young ones where they could do what they want

Noise sufferer

Certain people in certain environments are not going to get along. They should put all working people together. [And] think ‘right, we have got an old person here and a young person with kids here, should we put them together?’

Female, 18-30, London

They should restrict properties to one type of social grouping

Noise sufferer

At the macro-level of the neighbourhood this is clearly contrary to progressive government policy regarding sustainable communities and the integration (rather than segregation) of different age, racial or social groups. While this is a concerning ‘solution’ for participants to draw rather than policies aimed at encouraging community cohesion and diversity, there may be some application at the micro-scale, for example through ‘vetting’ procedures and more choice for tenants in the rental sector. This already exists to some extent in both the private and social rented sectors, but this is not perceived as effective or enforced at present, particularly in the private-rented sector:

But they shouldn’t put people who have got kids above people like that [older people sensitive to noise]

Female, 18-30, London

Because of the points allocation they are due a house and the council are not checking them as well as they should do

Noise sufferer

I think the Housing Strategy is a key element here because the council can unintentionally create problem areas

Stakeholder

It was in his lease that he wasn’t allowed to let to anyone that wasn’t a family unit, but he still did

Noise sufferer

Where we’re living now the initial contract stated that every property should be for single family occupation, and no-body is allowed to sublet. But that is ignored and every complaint I have heard about is where a property has been sublet
6.5 Developing tolerance

There is evidence that those who hear more noise start to develop higher thresholds of tolerance. This is not sufficient to offset the exposure-annoyance relationship; those who hear more neighbour noise (for example in high density urban areas) are still, in general, far more likely to be annoyed by it.

What it does explain, however, is why people who have much lower exposure to noise (e.g. in more rural areas) can sometimes be annoyed by relatively low exposure to it. Lack of exposure to noise can result in a lower threshold of tolerance, which itself causes annoyance when noise is heard:

Whatever type of noise it is would annoy me now, because I don’t live in a noisy area

Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

I wouldn’t put up with the noises I get here at my parents house, because they are outside the city. It infuriates me when I am there at weekends. Probably if I heard that in the town I would think ‘ah well, what can you do’

Female, 30-50, Edinburgh
7. Impact of Tenure

The significance of tenure has already been noted in that residents in social rented accommodation are more likely to be noise sufferers, whereas noise makers are more likely to be in either social rented or private rented accommodation. Furthermore, there is a feeling that letting policy in the private and social rented sectors is being ignored and creating ‘problem’ placements.

Furthermore, the focus groups and depth interviews raise issues about residents in private rented accommodation. There is a feeling among some participants that because of their short term rental status, private renters do not care about the property, local area or their neighbours:

I find the renters don’t usually care. They are moving on in six months time so they don’t care if they annoy the neighbours or not
Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

I thought if they were waiting to be moved on they would behave better, but they seemed to take the opposite opinion – ‘we are not going to be here long so we’ll do what we like’
Noise sufferer

The problem seems to be greater in areas of mixed tenure, where homes are purchased and then sub let, or in some cases where former council properties are purchased under Right-to-Buy. In many of the depth interviews there was a resentment at different rules for residents depending on their tenure status, and also the problem that control of private sector (either rental or ownership) is more difficult than the social rented sector. Noise sufferers make frequent reference to the fact they are told by the council there is little that can be done because they are not council tenants and hence not under their jurisdiction:

There is a big difference [private versus the council]. There is something I could do about the council, but not private
Female, 30-50, Cardiff

We phoned the woman at the council and she basically told me that there was nothing they could do because they are not council tenants
Noise sufferer

They did not tell me that the flat above was not a council rent. They did not disclose that. I am really annoyed because if I misbehave I can be evicted, but if they misbehave they cannot
Noise sufferer
To me it [owner-occupiers next door through right-to-buy] makes them arrogant because they feel they are owners and are not under the same rules as us anymore.

Noise sufferer

We have a row of council properties, but opposite are bought houses. You don’t speak to them as much, they have got their big back gardens so they tend to be on their own.

Noise maker

If it was a council property you could get a housing officer up and try and sort it out. But they say it is more difficult with a sub-tenant.

Noise sufferer

A further problem with the private rented sector is the lack of recourse to the landlord, who are often seen as part of the problem:

We actually phoned the owner of the property. He didn’t want to know. He even tried to say we had the wrong number. He is never up to see the property, he is just not interested.

Noise sufferer

It was primarily the landlord who was the underlying problem.

Noise sufferer

The owner of the property is never up to see the damage. He is just not interested; she’s [the tenant] paying the rent and that’s it.

Noise sufferer

In private rented they have almost got more powers, it is all on short lets so they can get rid of them. We approach the private landlords and we have had several cases solved by private landlords kicking them out. But then someone who lives the other side of London who owns one flat is very different to the social landlord who has got 1,000 properties in the borough.

Stakeholder
8. Noise Makers

One in ten people have been complained about because of noise (11%). This is twice as likely to be younger people aged 15-24 (21%).

8.1 Profiling noise makers

The analysis has already demonstrated the profile of noise makers (see section 2). While it is important not to over-generalise (the groups identified are more likely to be noise makers, but are by no means exclusively so), the segmentation analysis reveals they tend to be male, younger, in relatively deprived areas and in either social or private rented accommodation.

8.2 Are noise makers aware they are causing a problem?

Noise makers are divided as to whether they are aware they are making a noise that bothers their neighbours. From the four case study areas, two in five noise makers (41%) say they are unaware they are causing a noise disturbance, and so policies aimed at raising awareness, either through communications or by encouraging dialogue between neighbours, are likely to be successful in these instances. However, as many as half (50%) are aware they are causing a disturbance, and so alternative measures are clearly required to bring about a change in behaviour. Among the ‘aware’ group the key factor is a belief they have the right to make noise.
8.3 Right to make noise

The difference between noise makers and noise sufferers on perceptions of the right to make noise is striking. Over half (56%) of noise makers think they should be allowed to make noise in their own home/personal space, while only 25% disagree. This is in contrast to noise sufferers; only 38% think they are entitled to make noise in their home whereas 44% disagree.

Perceptions of Right to Make Noise: Sufferers Versus Makers

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I should be allowed to make noise in my own home - it's my personal space?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complained about a neighbour</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Been complained about by a neighbour</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, only one in three noise makers (36%) dispute the complaint against them was justified, compared to over half (54%) who agree it was. Furthermore, in the qualitative research there is acknowledgement among some noise makers that they do feel guilty and that there are limits to making noise (even if they are later in the evening than others would like), which is encouraging from the point of view of targeting messages at noise makers aimed at bringing about behavioural change:
I am guilty, after I come back from clubs and things like that. I am a noise polluter

Female, 18-30, Leicester

I play piano and saxophone, so it is probably quite annoying if it’s after a certain time at night. [I only] play until 10pm

Female, 18-30, Leicester

The qualitative research also demonstrates differences in the context in which noise makers assume they have a right to make noise. For example, there is a belief that while noise makers need to consider their neighbours, it is unreasonable for others to assume they have a right to a completely ‘noise-free’ environment. There is also a defence of ‘one-off’ events such as a party:

She cannot have complete silence; that is unfair. She might think it’s unfair that I am doing something but it is equally unfair that I can’t do anything because of her

Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

I was hoovering at 4pm and they started banging on the wall!

Noise maker

Nine times out of ten there are not any parties. It is not a weekly occurrence or a monthly occurrence. So you say to yourself [about them], ‘come on, be reasonable’

Noise maker

I do feel that if someone is having a party you just have to put up with it, as long as it’s not every weekend

Noise maker

Furthermore, noises from children playing are strongly defended by noise makers. This is an area for concern since 29% of people who are annoyed by noise identify ‘children/ young people’ as the source of the problem (see section 4). This represents a significant mismatch in expectations between noise sufferers and noise makers:

I would never consider stopping my children playing in their own garden, that is something I would guard jealously

Female, 30-50, Cardiff

She got on to my daughter who was bouncing a ball in the front garden, and she came down and told her to stop that because it was making too much noise. And last week she shouted at the grand children who are aged six and three. They are kids, and kids have got to play

Noise maker
Neighbour Noise

I have an older couple on the other side who I don’t really get on with. I have got an eight year-old son who has friends who come round with bikes and scooters, and they shout at them, which really annoys me

Noise maker

Many of these examples demonstrate how noise makers’ perceptions of right to make noise are limited to specific noises like children playing or an occasional party, and that they do often recognise the competing rights of other people. However, of concern is the number of cases where noise makers believe they have the right to make any noise irrespective of anyone else:

They say ‘can you keep the noise down, we weren’t told there was a function’. Who cares, it’s my street. If they don’t like it they can move, I’m not moving

Asian male, 18-30, Leicester

I played music all day every day. When the lads used to come round. They called to confiscate the stereo, but I had one of those old divan beds and I hid the stereo in there, they couldn’t find it

Male, 18-30, Leicester

I had some subwoofers in my Escort and it had really deep base. But the woman across the road complained. I was, like, sod it. It comes down to the fact that I think I have got a right to do it

Male, 18-30, Leicester
9. Noise Complaints

9.1 How frequent are complaints about noise?

One in ten people (11%) among the general population has complained about neighbour noise. Taken as a proportion of those who are annoyed, bothered or disturbed this represents close to two in five cases (39%), showing that a significant number of noise problems do result in some form of complaint.

Levels of Complaints

Q Have you ever complained about a noise issue caused by a neighbour?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>All who are annoyed by noise from neighbours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 6,116 residents, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003 Source: MORI

9.2 Who do people complain to?

The majority of people who have complained about noise do so to the person making the noise (72%). It is evident that people complain to more than one category, and close to one in four (23%) also complained to the police, 19% complained to the council’s environmental health department, and one in ten (10%) to their landlord. Just four percent have spoken to their councillor/ MP.

Who do people complain to?

Q Have you ever complained about a noise issue caused by a neighbour to any of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour/person causing the noise</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The police</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority - Environmental Health department</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority - other department</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlord</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP/councillor</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 681 residents who have made a complaint about neighbour noise, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003 Source: MORI
Neighbour relations are once again significant. Where relations are good, the majority of complaints are handled between neighbours; only seven percent complain to the police, for example. However, poor relations lead to more formal complaints, with the proportion complaining to the police rising to 26%.

Age is also important. It has already been noted that while young people are more likely to hear noise, they are only as likely to be annoyed as other age groups by virtue of their greater tolerance to noise. In terms of them actually making a complaint, they are the least likely age group to complain, only 29% of those annoyed by noise complain. Furthermore, if they do complain it is much more likely to be to the person concerned, accounting for 80% of complaints.

By contrast, fewer older people are exposed to, or annoyed by, noise. However, they are the age group most likely to complain; 42% of those aged 65+ who are annoyed by noise have made a complaint. Furthermore, when they do complain they are more likely to do so formally (54%). The differences in the way that different age groups respond to noise is reflected by the stakeholders:

I think the majority of noise nuisance complaints are generated by older people. I think where it becomes a problem for younger groups it does not manifest itself as a complaint, but rather some form of direct action

Stakeholder

9.3 Effectiveness of complaints: informal versus formal

The evidence suggests that complaining informally (i.e. between neighbours) is the best means of resolving a noise dispute. Among those who have complained to a neighbour, 62% are satisfied with the effectiveness of the complaint, better than formal complaints to both the environmental health department (49%) or police (48%). While not many sufferers seek recourse through their councillor or MP, it appears relatively effective for those who do (49%). Making the point once again about private rented accommodation, complaining to a landlord is the least effective means of complaint (39%).
Effectiveness of complaint

**Q Thinking about your complaint, how effective do you feel it was?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informally between neighbours</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The police</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Council - Env Health Department</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Council - other department</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlord</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local MP/councillor</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All those who have made a complaint about noise to each, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003

This is supported by the qualitative research. Good neighbour relations and informal dialogue clearly have benefits:

*We have got a reasonably good relationship and we do communicate. So I have been able to say ‘it was a bit late, the kids were woken up’. But if there isn’t an open line of communication, I think that’s when you have the battles.*

**Female, 30-50, Cardiff**

*When the neighbours were noisy, they actually came round for a get together. They were basically apologising and didn’t want to cause any upset, which is fair enough.*

**Asian male, 18-30, Leicester**

*It could just be dropped into the conversation – ‘oh so and so didn’t sleep well last night, there was a bit of noise’. But you don’t have to say it was them, they might just take the hint from there.*

**Female, 30-50, Cardiff**

*I would actually say to my neighbour ‘oh your son had a good party the other night’ and then she will go and sort him out.*

**Female, 30-50, Banbury**

*They tried to be as nice as they could be about it and we said we’d do whatever we could about it.*

**Noise maker**
In contrast, there is recognition that complaining to official agencies before talking to the neighbour first could actually make the situation worse:

It is going to make them more angry I think to involve other agencies. If they come round and they have not even realised they are being annoying

Female, 18-30, Leicester

With your neighbour you have a kind of relationship and you have to keep that relationship, so it's better to get to them first without going through a third party

Asian male, 18-30, Leicester

I think I would be annoyed because they hadn't come to me first, you know, they had gone through the Council

Male, 30-50, Cardiff

If they asked the police to come round I would be a bit annoyed rather than if they just came round and said 'look it's too loud, can you turn it down'. You would appreciate that more, I think

Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

Significantly, the preference for an informal approach to complaint resolution is also evident among noise makers. Overall, the majority of complaints have a positive outcome from the perspective of the noise maker; 80% of those who are complained about say they take significant action to reduce the noise (35% stop the noise completely while 45% take steps to reduce it). Only one in eight (12%) don't do much and just two percent make more noise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely stopped the noise</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took some steps to stop the noise</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't do much</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make more noise</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q And following the complaint against you, to what degree did you make efforts to change the noise they said you were making?

Base: 194 residents who have been complained about, 16+, face-to-face and in-home, Dundee, Greenwich, Lewisham and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 27 March-30 April 2003 Source: MORI
However, the way in which the complaint is made is highly significant. Although the base sizes are small, there appears a clear benefit to complaining informally; 100% of alleged noise makers say they completely stopped making the noise. However, where formal channels of recourse are taken, no-one completely stopped making the noise and as many as one in five (21%) didn’t do much or even made more noise.

Where complaints are made informally there is a greater chance the noise maker will consider the complaint justified; close to two in three (62%) agree the complaint against them was justified compared to 51% of cases where the first complaint was made to someone else. Similarly, 74% of those complained to informally felt it was done in an appropriate manner compared to 57% of people who were complained about formally. And the chances of an amicable resolution are increased by informal dialogue between neighbours; 90% feel the situation has been resolved, in contrast to 80% who were complained about formally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Vs Formal Complaints: Perceptions of Noise Makers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that...?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The complaint against you was justified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal: 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal: 51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The complaint was made in an appropriate way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal: 74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal: 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation has now been resolved between you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal: 90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal: 80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 68 noise makers who have been complained informally to; 120 noise makers complained formally about, 16+, face-to-face, in-home, Dundee, Greenwich, Lewisham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 27 March 2003 - 30 April 2003

Source: MORI

9.4 Can disputes always be resolved informally?

While the benefits of an informal approach to dispute resolution are clear, the research suggests that it may not always be possible. There is no doubting the theory of the approach; 85% accept it is better to talk to the person making the noise first. However, there is a difference in reality with as many as one in three (32%) not comfortable about approaching their neighbour regarding noise.
Indeed, the main reasons for not complaining reflect a desire to avoid repercussions/backlash (22%) and just to ‘keep the peace’ (15%).

Concerns about complaining to a neighbour appear justified under certain circumstances. Where relations are good prior to the noise dispute, it is most likely that relations will stay the same following a complaint (76%), while only in nine percent of cases do relations worsen. However, where relations are poor there is a much higher chance that relations will deteriorate still further; over one in three (36%) report that relations got worse following their complaint.
Complaining When Neighbour Relations are poor

Q. And would you say relations with your neighbours have got better, worse or stayed the same as a result of the noise disturbance/complaint?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good relations</th>
<th>Poor relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Got better</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed the same</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got worse</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 2,217 residents bothered by noise or been complained about, Great Britain, 15+, face-to-face, in-home, Dec 2002 - Jan 2003

These concerns are reflected in the qualitative research. There is a sense that there are some people that cannot be approached, and similarly there are examples where informal complaints did not work well:

You have got to understand, there are a lot of people you can’t talk to

Female, 30-50, Cardiff

People like this would swear and spit at you

Asian male, 18-30, Leicester

I would feel intimidated because of the repercussions. You never quite know what the reaction would be afterwards

Female, 30+, Thirsk

It is down to the person really because if they are a difficult person you can’t reason with them

Male, 18-30, London

I called the police because they were toe-rags basically and I thought if I go down there I will either get a mouthful or we will end up in a punch up

Male, 30-50, Banbury

They said they would try to keep it down but they didn’t. They weren’t taking us seriously, so I thought if I report them that might get through

Noise sufferer

We went up and asked them to turn the music down a few times and it got to the point where they’d [friends of tenants] come down and knock on our door, give us a load of abuse and then jump in a taxi and drive off

Noise sufferer
The qualitative research clearly demonstrates that the way in which an informal complaint is made has a significant bearing on its success. Aggressive complaints with swearing are clearly not desirable:

If she came to the door raving and ranting, I wouldn’t speak to her

Male, 30-50, Cardiff

If someone came and knocked at my door and said something to me, if it was done politely I would take it on board, but not if someone is going to shout at me

Female, 30-50, Cardiff

If they come round and they are annoying you, you just blast up your music because you know it is going to annoy them. She gives me dirty looks so I just do it even more

Male, 18-30, Leicester

It depends how they approach you as well. If they have got a proper attitude, you are going to do it. If you go round there effing and blinding then you have made an enemy

Male, 18-30, Leicester
10. Priorities for Noise Services

A range of policy measures have been proposed to alleviate the problem of neighbour noise. This section looks at the public’s reaction to some of them.

The quantitative studies in the four case study areas reveal that there is no single measure seen by the public as the answer to noise disputes, but rather a range or package of measures. The most frequently mentioned options focus on time, both to the incident as it happens (40%) and also to resolution of the ensuing dispute (32%). Tougher legislation is also popular (31%), as is follow-up work once a complaint has been made (28%).

Many of these measures were identified and talked at length by noise sufferers, noise makers and focus group participants. They are now discussed in turn.
10.1 Legislation/Powers of intervention

One of the major concerns among noise sufferers is that the powers available to local authorities and the police regarding neighbour noise are limited. The perception that authorities were ‘unable to do anything’ is widespread across most depth interviews with sufferers:

I have complained twice and the council said they would pass it on, but there was not much they could do about it
Noise sufferer

They [police] have their hands tied
Noise sufferer

We got the police round to see if that would make an impression. But they waited for maybe half an hour and then they [noise maker] would just turn it back up again
Noise sufferer

It seems very difficult for them [the council] to do anything
Noise sufferer

I phoned the police and they came round and warned them, but that didn’t work
Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

A particular concern related to this is the length of the complaint procedure. Noise sufferers frequently talk about the process lasting over many months with multiple warnings but no real outcome:

They have got to go through so many steps before they can take action. It is not an immediate result
Female, 30-50, Banbury

The only thing we could do was keep on and on, and maybe get an anti-social behaviour order against them
Noise sufferer

I have about nine letters in the last three years from the council, warning him about his behaviour
Noise sufferer

The process is long and their powers are limited. They tell me it could take up to about a year to get a person evicted if they are too noisy. It is a long process. It is not pleasant for anyone but how many warnings does he need?
Noise sufferer
They went through all the motions and they did petitions and the rest of it, and the local press, and finally the Council evicted them. But it is a long and lengthy procedure.

Female, 30-50, Edinburgh

They gave him a couple of warnings, then a written warning, then a noise abatement notice, and after that two more warnings. So it was quite a lot of warnings he had.

Noise sufferer

This is also acknowledged by stakeholders who point to the need for faster responses to neighbour noise disputes, for example through revised use of anti-social behaviour orders, through new measures for ‘inconsiderate’ behaviour, and more simple steps such as recording all incidents at a particular household in order to build up a comprehensive ‘case history’ for anyone subsequently responding to a further complaint:

The process of applying for an A SBO and for getting one granted can be quite long and bureaucratic. We really need within the A SBO lines some way of being able to intervene quickly, almost like an injunction.

Stakeholder

I think there is a difference between anti-social behaviour and inconsiderate behaviour. The current legislation on noise is quite difficult to enforce and too prescriptive.

Stakeholder

We have different officers attending perhaps the same address on a number of occasions because of shift patterns, training, holidays or whatever. So it’s difficult to create an audit trail that is particular to a single address, and it looks like there is no co-ordinated response. So we have created a system whereby when we take a call the operator can click on the address and it brings up a history of calls. But that is quite an investment in terms of IT.

Stakeholder

This leads in many cases to a call for more legislative powers to deal with neighbour noise nuisance. Of note, tougher legislation is popular among both noise sufferers and the wider public:

I think they should initiate on-the-spot fines, like they do for drunken behaviour in the city centre. If you hit them in the pocket they will start listening to you.

Female, 30-50, Cardiff
You need to give penalties - most young people don't care. What is the incentive not to do it?

Male, 30+, Thirsk

I think Councils should have more power to punish people who are persistently making noise.

Male, 18-30, London

I am in favour of legislation. I think my Council tax would be worthwhile if it went towards that.

Male, 18-30, London

I do feel there should be more powers, especially from council properties to evict people making others live a misery.

Noise sufferer

If your dog fouls this footpath you will be fined; [similarly] if you make excessive noise you will be fined x amount.

Male, 30-50, Banbury

However, stakeholders are more cautious, and point to the need for an ‘impact assessment’ of any new measures, in terms of their application in practice, administration and enforcement. Several stakeholders also feel part of the problem is that the people involved have ‘nothing to lose’ and so measures such as fines are ineffective, while evictions serve only to ‘shift’ the problem:

There is no impact assessment about new legislation. One of the impacts is that while we are getting additional police officers they are being taken away because of new responsibilities. The answer from government is to meet this from existing budgets - it is not sustainable.

Stakeholder

I really feel like the Government are pushing initiatives but I think what we need is to make sure that thought is put into the implementation of legislation, networking and funding or services to meet the requirements of the legislation. It’s no good issuing legislation and saying it’s there, there needs to be support.

Stakeholder

Even with all these sanctions and mediation and everything, she [noise maker] gets no fines because she is on benefit so can’t pay them. And we can’t evict her because she’s a single mum so would have to be re-housed immediately. But there has to be some sanctions against these people and at the moment we haven’t got any.

Stakeholder
10.2 Feedback about noise complaints

The way in which the complaint is handled by the local council or police is significant in determining how satisfied clients are with the service they received. Relatively small considerations such as face-to-face contact at the time of the complaint and feedback on what has happened as a result appear to have a large impact on satisfaction and confidence in the service:

One young chap came out [from environmental health] and he was very nice. He could hear all the banging about and children jumping and went up there. When he came back down he said the kids are out of control. At least he came back and told me, you know

Noise sufferer

I reckon that nobody was interested and they were just trying to palm it off onto someone else. He [police liaison officer] was a lot better. At least he came out and spoke to us and went up and saw them

Noise sufferer

I do not even know if when I made my complaints they actually did anything, I do not know what took place

Noise sufferer

The guy [police liaison officer] was marvellous, he actually came back a couple of times and spoke to me about it, but I must say the council’s attitude was really disappointing

Noise sufferer

I never got any reply, I have no idea what they did

Noise sufferer

One of the biggest complaints we have is that we do not tell people what we are going to do after they make a complaint. We do not go back and say “here is what happened”

Stakeholder

10.3 Housing and planning policy

Housing and planning policy is considered important by noise sufferers and the general public in a number of respects. Firstly, there is a focus on the building regulations of any new housing stock, with higher standards for the design of homes and the materials used in construction:

Build better houses with noise standards

Female, 30-50, Cardiff
Some of these modern houses built in the ’80s are cardboard homes.

Male, 30-50, Edinburgh

The modern building is not really built to withstand sound. You used to have cavities between walls which broke up sound transmission, but now there’s no cavity so now I can hear my neighbour flush the toilet.

Noise sufferer

Through the planning process we’ve managed to increase insulation in the building regulation standards and we’ve had a successful planning appeal case where the inspectors ruled in our favour and upgraded the conditions.

Stakeholder

Building regulations have been amended but don’t tend to cope with low frequency noises. A lot of the problems we have are with base music.

Stakeholder

If they do decide to make more buildings, make them more soundproof. That would solve a lot of it.

Noise sufferer

In terms of the existing stock there is support for the upgrading of properties and regulation of materials and fixtures within homes in the rental sector, for example the use of carpets as opposed to stripped floors:

I partly blame the council because they will not spend the money on sound proofing.

Noise sufferer

There is no double glazing or anything, there is no carpet on the stairs, you can hear all noises.

Noise sufferer

If you have carpets the noise is muffled. But new laminate floorings make the houses echo. There is nothing you can do, because they are probably just leading normal lives.

Noise sufferer

I think there should definitely be something about not having stripped floorboards.

Noise sufferer

All the housing associations apparently tell their tenants that they have to put floor coverings down.

Noise sufferer
This draws attention to wider possibilities within the social rented sector to provide and enforce tenancy agreements which stipulate the responsibilities of the tenant in respect of noise in particular and to their neighbours in general:

They should stipulate what they want from tenants from the start. They are letting out the house, it is their responsibility to dictate on what terms they are letting the house on

Noise sufferer who did not complain

We have got plenty of agreements we have to abide by [from the housing association] but it seems like this guy just gets away with it

Noise sufferer

Obviously when he got the house he was told what the conditions were. And it’s surely up to people to abide by those conditions

Noise sufferer

I think tenancy agreements are quite a good way to address it from the start, rather than deal with things at the back end through ASBOs. If people had a clear indication of what was expected of them in relation to noise that would be useful, but it has to be something that is enforceable

Stakeholder

There is support for tough action against those who do not abide by such agreements, including the use of visible ‘examples’ of evictions to demonstrate the deterrent. However, there is also acknowledgement that this sometimes only serves to ‘shift’ the problem somewhere else:

They [housing association] are letting them see from the beginning that they weren’t putting up with anything antisocial. If they can do [this], why can’t the council?

Noise sufferer

They were shifted to another part of the country, I won’t say where, but to my knowledge they are still causing problems. They really were a nasty lot

Noise sufferer

A further issue for concern is a lack of information; several noise sufferers complained about not being informed about the property they were moving into or the landlord responsible for the property:
You ask them if there are any issues and they tell you no. They blatantly lie to you, they know there are problem tenants but they do not tell you about it

Noise sufferer

They are renting and I haven’t got a clue who from because nobody will tell us, Environmental Health or anyone

Noise sufferer

10.4 Information & awareness

There is very low public awareness of local council noise services; in the four case study areas close to two in three (62%) have never heard of them, and another 14% have heard of them but know nothing about what they do. In contrast, only nine percent feel well informed about the service, well below the 29% on average who say they are disturbed, annoyed or bothered by noise and so who may benefit from details of local noise services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of Noise Service</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q How much, if at all, would you say you know about the noise reduction service provided by your local council?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>A fair amount</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Aware of but know nothing about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Never heard of 62%

Of the four areas selected for the follow-up surveys, awareness is highest in Greenwich; 16% say they know a ‘great deal/fair amount’ compared to six percent across the other areas. Significantly, awareness of a formal noise service does not seem to reduce informal complaints. Informal approaches are just as likely in Greenwich as elsewhere, and so the benefit of awareness of the service is to clarify formal options should informal approaches not work. The qualitative groups acknowledge the low level of awareness alongside a need to find out more:

I think if people actually knew there was something called a noise team – I mean I wasn’t even aware

Female, 30-50, Cardiff
There are a lot of people – me included – who wouldn’t know who to phone to put a complaint to

Male, 30+, Thirsk

They should make it public what the law is, we don’t know. And what procedure to take, because I wouldn’t know who to ring. I would probably call the police

Male, 18-30, Leicester

I think there is a need to promote us a little bit more but the problem at the moment is that local authorities are very cash strapped

Stakeholder

10.5 Complexity of cases

One of the implications for noise professionals is that the noise ‘perpetrator’ in a dispute could actually be a victim of domestic violence or abuse. This has been acknowledged by Shelter, and has implications for how people complain and the need for collaboration between agencies (council, police) and within organisations (e.g. housing department, environmental health, anti-social behaviour teams and domestic violence teams). Similarly, there is a suggestion that noise disputes can be compounded with mental health problems, again requiring an approach from the authorities that recognises the complexities of the case:

I think she is not very healthy, she had her children taken away from her just recently

Noise sufferer

I think there is a mental health problem there. I don’t know if he is mental - you can’t say that - but there is something not right with the guy. I don’t think he should have been housed here in the first place, he should be in some form of sheltered accommodation where someone can keep an eye on him

Noise sufferer

The problems between neighbours are incredibly difficult. We get involved with the mental health team, we involve the police, mediation, landlords, we will use every weapon we possibly can

Stakeholder

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2 As reported in the Guardian Society, June 4 2003
10.6 Mediation

Attitudes towards mediation services are positive, although concerns are raised that it may not always be possible. In particular, the mediation option clearly breaks down if one of the parties does not agree, and it is also evident that for mediation to be effective it needs to be an intervention early in the dispute, rather than in a developed dispute where relations have become too strained:

With the young couple downstairs that would probably work, they are intelligent people, but with the chap next door it doesn’t register; it goes in one ear and out the other

Noise sufferer

These people have been driving us bananas for months with noise, I think we are past mediation

Noise sufferer

To be honest I don’t think that would work now because I feel there is too much bad feeling now

Noise sufferer

We also have difficulty when we think mediation would be a good tack but only one of the parties is agreeable to that

Stakeholder

Theoretically it is a marvellous thing. Obviously if people could sit down and solve their problems without involving the law or anyone, that has got to be the preferred option. But I have concerns [based on] anecdotal evidence that many customers are dissatisfied with the outcomes

Stakeholder

10.7 Communicating with the public

The research shows that there is qualified support for communications campaigns aimed at neighbour noise. While it is not identified by the public as a major priority against other pressing issues (only 10% identify it as a priority), there is support for a campaign framed in wider terms and based upon a theme along the lines of ‘consider your neighbour’, also reflecting wider liveability and community-based issues.

Furthermore, it is felt that any campaign would be beneficial in not only targeting noise makers in order to change their behaviour, but also in reassuring noise sufferers and the wider population that these issues are taken seriously with avenues of recourse available. Focus group participants stress the need to keep campaigns specific and reinforce the message that neighbour noise is as socially unacceptable as things like dog fouling and dropping litter.
[communications] need to be specific and local. We are all so different – like the London boroughs are different from the way we are and how people live in this area

Female, 30+, Thirsk

You would have to start with the advertising, be aware, be kind to your neighbours and things - do things at a reasonable time and a reasonable noise level

Male, 30-50, Cardiff

It’s awareness isn’t it. It is anything that is antisocial - litter, noise - if it is brought to people’s attention then it might give them the opportunity to think and change

Female, 30+, Thirsk

In Australia if you drop litter people will moan at you. If you educate people then it will work here but it will take time, it is a generation thing

Male, 30-50, Banbury

If it was on the telly it would get into your head like adverts

Female, 18-30, London
11. Implications for a Communications Strategy

This section outlines the work of Grant Riches Communications Consultants, outlining recommendations for communicating to noise makers, noise sufferers and the plethora of organisations and bodies with a responsibility for neighbour noise issues.

11.1 A targeted campaign on liveability

Given the complexity of the neighbour noise issue, a general awareness-raising campaign is likely to be expensive and ineffective. Neighbour noise is not an issue for 71% of the population but is a significant issue for one in three people, particularly in high density rented housing in urban areas. This shows the importance of a targeted and specific communications campaign, particularly as much of it will need to be done in partnership with councils, the police, voluntary agencies, community groups and landlords, all of whom have limited resources.

In communications terms, the issue is particularly powerful as it ties in with the current interest in the ‘liveability agenda’, the number one issue for many statutory agencies and individual citizens. However, targeting will once again be important. The liveability agenda is broad and includes other issues like dog fouling, litter, abandoned vehicles, street drinking, drug abuse and anti-social behaviour. It is vital that awareness of and solutions to the problems of neighbour noise aren’t lost in this package of other concerns. Many members of the public, particularly in urban areas, feel frustrated at the lack of ‘joined up’ solutions to the problems that affect their daily lives. There is a big opportunity in this campaign to offer targeted, specific help to alleviate one of the most significant elements.

The liveability agenda is also broad in terms of how statutory agencies respond to it. Most councils have increased their staffing to tackle it but there is no common structure or name for these new local authority officers or teams. Some are based in traditional environmental health departments while others may be found in regeneration or housing departments. It will be an important part of the communications strategy to ensure that this research reaches the right policymakers and enforcers within councils and other statutory agencies.

There is much rich material in the research which can be used particularly to achieve media coverage on these themes across the range of target media. However, while Defra should do all it can to secure broad interest in the research, we recommend that the communications campaign should be based round some key objectives and some main messages, set out below.
11.2 Objectives and main messages

We recommend that the campaign should have two main objectives:

- raising awareness: targeted promotion of the messages in the research. What causes noise nuisance and what can be done about it?

- prompting behavioural change: specific communications that encourage people not to make noise or to take action about it in the most appropriate way.

Inevitably there will be some overlap in these two strands, for example raising awareness of solutions may also influence behavioural change. This should help to reinforce both objectives.

The main messages running throughout the campaign would be:

- making a noise isn’t a right;
- be a good neighbour and think before you make noise;
- complaining informally works best: for noise sufferers and noise makers;
- formal help is available if you need it.

11.3 Raising awareness

The target audiences for this element of the campaign would be:

- general public (particularly those who might exert peer pressure on noise makers);
- noise sufferers;
- noise makers;
- policymakers and enforcers: local authorities, police, RSLs, private landlords;
- advisers: voluntary sector advice and mediation agencies, tenants’ and residents’ groups, councillors, MPs;
- educational bodies: schools, colleges and other institutions with a direct or indirect influence on young people (a key noise maker group).

Recommended channels to reach these audiences include the following.
Neighbour Noise

Media
The research is rich in possibilities for media coverage based upon:

- socio demographic factors - tenure, deprivation, age, urbanity;
- human dimension - neighbour relations, community cohesion, inconsideration;
- how to complain about noise both informally and formally: raising awareness of the effectiveness of appropriate informal complaints and the existence of noise control services.

The campaign would need to derive some strong case studies/quotes/facts and figures to support it. Much of this should be available from the fieldwork conducted so far.

The media campaign could run through broadsheets, tabloids and consumer press as well as having a strong local angle (the findings on community cohesion and neighbourliness make a particularly strong angle).

Specialist media could be targeted to raise awareness of the key issues with policy makers/enforcers and advisers and educational bodies. This should specifically target housing, police, local government, voluntary sector and educational media. It would also be important to target the in-house media of these groups, including professional association magazines such as the Chartered Institute of Housing, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Police Federation, Association of Chief Police Officers, Local Government Association and others.

Events
The campaign could also include a series of national/regional conferences for policy makers, enforcers and advisers and events highlighting the issues and linking to the campaign to change behaviour (see below). It would also be important to offer speakers from Defra, EnCams and MORI to take up speaking opportunities at other events and perhaps develop a standard speaker’s presentation and briefing pack to support this.

Direct Mail
A targeted mailing of briefing material highlighting key action points to policymakers/enforcers, advisers and educational bodies would help to reinforce the media campaign by communicating with:

- councils: including officers and councillors;
- RSLs;
- private landlord associations;
- police;
- environmental health;
- CABx/ advice/ mediation services.
11.4 Changing behaviour

The campaign to raise awareness should be backed up by a more focused campaign to prompt changes in behaviour. This element of the campaign would be targeted at:

- policymakers/enforcers: encouraging them to raise awareness of their services and to promote informal and formal solutions to noise nuisance;
- advisers: encouraging them to make noise sufferers aware of the informal and formal solutions to noise nuisance;
- noise sufferers: making them aware of the informal and formal solutions to noise nuisance;
- noise makers: making them aware of the problems caused by noise nuisance and encouraging them to make less noise and to be receptive to informal solutions.

This part of the campaign would be particularly aimed at the proportion of noise makers who would be likely to change their behaviour if they were made aware of it in an appropriate way (41%). It would also be aimed at changing the behaviour and perceptions of noise sufferers, who often:

- don’t feel empowered to complain informally;
- don’t know what formal methods of complaint are available;
- aren’t always impressed with the help that is available once they are aware of it.

Standard materials

With so much rich data available from the MORI study, Defra could produce standard materials/templates which were available on the website for use by interested parties, for examples local council departments.

The benefit of this approach is that it derives maximum benefit from the research already completed and makes it available to the widest possible audience at the lowest possible cost. Target audiences could download the material, including text and visual imagery, and adapt it for their own use. This would be particularly useful for smaller organisations such as tenants’ associations and for groups of organisations working in partnership on liveability issues. It would also mean that common messages and the appropriate ‘tone of voice’ were more likely to be retained across a range of communications.
These standard materials could include:

- a template communications action plan for enforcers to use when promoting their services and the range of remedies available to noise sufferers. The template communications plan and the standard material could draw on the MORI research findings and on best practice among case study councils and enforcement agencies. This would allow the benefits of 'what works' to be shared quickly and effectively across the country. In particular, it would highlight the best methods for publicising the existence of services to tackle noise nuisance and the best techniques for communicating with complainants once enforcement is underway;

- standard materials to back up the communications plan which could include leaflets, complaint forms, noise diaries etc.;

- standard text for council and RSL tenants’ handbooks, tenancy agreements, welcome packs for new tenants, tenants’/community newsletters. This could include information on statutory requirements but also reinforce the importance of neighbourliness ('think before you make a noise') and emphasise the effectiveness of appropriate, informal complaints;

- standard material for council A-Z guides, council newspapers and telephone directory entries, highlighting the existence of noise services and the perhaps also highlighting informal methods of complaining;

- standard materials for use by mediators, advice agencies, councillors, MPs and tenants’ groups for when they are approached for help by noise sufferers. This could include frequently asked questions, common remedies, step-by-step guides to making a complaint both formally and informally and posters for housing offices, CABx, community centres;

- standard materials for use by student accommodation and welfare officers including emphasising the importance of neighbourliness and highlighting the obligation of students in private rented accommodation;

- standard materials for private landlords emphasising the importance of neighbourliness and highlighting the obligation of tenants in private rented accommodation;

- standard materials which could be used by teachers when talking to pupils about citizenship, social responsibility and anti-social behaviour, highlighting the good neighbourliness point and also giving case studies of noise makers who changed their behaviour.
A youth orientated campaign

A more specific campaign could be aimed at the main group of noise perpetrators – younger, male, living in either social rented or private rented accommodation. This sort of campaign would be particularly successful with some figurehead or celebrity to endorse it. This could involve features and activities targeting:

- youth media – TV, radio and magazines;
- tabloid media;
- brands/venues aimed at a young, male audience such as alcohol brands, clubs, pubs, music shops;
- Internet users.

This campaign would have to be thought through in more detail as it could easily end up being untargeted and therefore both ineffective and inefficient. However, it may be worth piloting some communication using these methods in specific areas or aimed at specific groups of noise makers. There is also potential for involving ‘reformed’ noise makers in developing some aspects of this campaign. It might be possible to work with specific local authorities or educational establishments to develop this in more detail.