



Sound Thinking



Foreword

Environmental noise causes serious harms to people's health, wellbeing and quality of life. It affects millions of people across England and Wales and remains one of the most significant, yet often overlooked, environmental challenges facing our communities. Reducing noise-related harm must be a public health priority.

At first glance the picture appears encouraging. Recorded noise complaints have fallen. However, the evidence in this report suggests that complaint numbers alone do not provide a complete picture of noise harm. Variations in recording practices, differences in reporting behaviour and public polling all indicate the need for a more consistent and robust understanding of how noise affects people's lives and health. Fewer complaints does not necessarily mean less harm. What this report highlights is the need for better evidence to support better action. While complaint data tells us about demand reaching local authority services, it does not fully capture the extent of people's experiences of noise or its wider impacts on health and wellbeing. To reduce noise-related harm effectively, we must improve how we understand, record and monitor it.

I'm very grateful to the members and stakeholders who have come together to support CIEH through this project, providing the data and insights on which this report is built. Now it is incumbent on us all to work together to make a collective difference. I know that environmental health colleagues will be up for the challenge.

The analysis in this report shows the challenge of tackling noise complaints, learning from the data and reducing noise harm on communities, including the need for more research in several areas.

I believe 'Sound Thinking' provides a helpful addition to the discussion on noise pollution and look forward to working with others, in the Westminster and Welsh Governments, and in local authorities across England and Wales on the challenges and opportunities it outlines.

Fran McCloskey

Chief Executive Officer, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health





Introduction

With CIEH focusing on securing much more comprehensive data than in previous years, the dataset produced by this survey of noise complaints is extremely valuable. Since its inception, the Public Health Outcomes Framework has included an indicator concerning the rate of complaints about noise and populating this indicator relies on the CIEH noise complaints survey results. The low response rate which has occurred in previous years rather devalued the usefulness of this indicator in the public health debate.

Adding specific questions on certain relatively new noise sources, in liaison with government officials, has further enhanced the value of this dataset.

However, it must be remembered that monitoring noise complaints alone provides an incomplete picture about the adverse effects of noise. Some people choose not to complain even if they are highly annoyed, whilst, as Environmental Health Practitioners are only too well aware, the opposite can be true. This is not a new observation. A similar view was expressed in a report on noise presented to Government in 1963¹.

What the number of complaints does tell us about is the workload on EH departments in dealing with this issue.

CIEH recognises that there are different methodologies used by EH departments to record complaints and that different software is used across England and Wales. One of the next challenges for CIEH is to explore how the complaint recording could be standardised and then reported more efficiently, covering both existing and emerging sources of noise.

Stephen Turner

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Notes

This report discusses England and Wales. References to the UK Government relate to its responsibilities for England.

This report notes the significant impact of transport noise on the public. However, the primary focus of the report is statutory enforcement by local authorities, given the significant role of EHPs in this work.



Executive summary and policy recommendations

The state of noise harm

Noise is acknowledged to be an overlooked pollutant that has a consistent impact on human health. The 2022-23 House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Report on neglected pollutants outlined the current scientific understanding of the impact on human health. The report's definition of noise is "unwanted sound", which can be broken down into pitch and volume, and is the basis for how noise is measured and tackled. The Government response to the Lords report recognised 'that noise is second only to poor air quality as an environmental cause of ill health in Europe, with impacts including increased risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disease, annoyance, sleep disturbance and cognitive impairment'.

Exposure to noise

A significant future-facing issue in terms of the recording of noise complaints is emerging sources of noise. This means there is a need for Environmental Health (EH) teams in local authorities (LAs) in England and Wales to record and respond to new or emerging risks to residents' wellbeing. These come from sources such as Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) as well as from social factors, such as short term let properties which are booked online.

Emerging technical sources of noise can be influenced by wider government policies regarding energy generation, including the greater establishment of onshore wind generation and the provision of grants towards the installation of ASHPs. Building up an awareness of the noise implications arising from these sources underpins the development and application of guidance for England and Wales.

What is currently recorded?

There are multiple sources of noise registered in noise complaints by local authority officers. For example, looking at the region of South West England, 16 out of 21 councils which responded to CIEH's Freedom of Information (FOI) request confirmed that they did record a breakdown of noise complaints by noise source. However, on looking at the lists of noise sources recorded by different councils, a large variation in the types and number of noise sources recorded on databases can be seen. One council employed 20 different codes within their database whereas another only utilised four (domestic, commercial, construction and industrial).

How we record noise complaints: now and next

CIEH's Ipsos polling asked respondents what measures they would like to have implemented to improve the complaints process. The most popular things included were for the ability to report noise online (32%), the option to report anonymously (31%), greater confidence that action will be taken by the council (28%) and updates on what action is being taken (27%). Overall numbers do indicate support for greater ease in reporting with 59% of respondents supporting reporting flexibility and accessibility. This indicates that use of technology in reporting is something the public would support to improve the reporting process with 18% of respondents also believing a dedicated app would help to resolve the issue.

Policy recommendations

1. Consistent database coding across England and Wales with national coding categories.

Consult with stakeholders at the local and national level on noise source categories and publish official lists of the coding categories for use by local authorities in England and Wales.

2. Provide a mechanism within consistent coding to allow adaptation of new noise sources into national coding categories list.

Within the consultation for the consistent coding recommendation, we recommend discussion of a mechanism that allows for local authorities to report newer or emerging sources of noise. There should also be an agreed mechanism for approving new source of noise to be added to the list.

3. Ensure guidance is provided to councils going through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

National coding categories by April 2028 would enable new unitary councils to record noise complaints with consistent coding in place from their first day and would provide a strong basis to then roll out to other unitary councils in England and Wales with practical advice on making the necessary database changes. Failing this, guidance to lead councils through transition must be provided.

4. Individual noise source reduction targets added into future noise reduction plans.

The UK and Welsh Governments should use the possibilities derived from consistent coding to analyse data on noise source numbers and year on year trends. Once reliable, to effectively inform noise reduction targets including measures to tackle specific noise sources and outlining success and health improvement through reductions in overall and highly complained about sources of noise.

5. Review resource allocation for EH services and Full Time Equivalency (FTE) for noise and nuisance work.

Governments should consider whether there is currently sufficient resourcing for councils to effectively tackle noise complaints. CIEH members have repeatedly explained during the process of creating this report that workforce shortages have a detrimental impact on how effectively they can respond to noise complaints in their area. The adoption of mobile phone apps and other technologies may help, but if there is an inadequate number of Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) who can travel across their authority and work to resolve noise complaints, the use of technology will not improve services and will not change the amount of time residents are exposed to noise.

6. Revisit the recommendations from the 2023 House of Lords Neglected Pollutants report.

The UK Government should complete its follow up to its 2023 response to the House of Lords report and revisit its key policy asks around noise including reemphasis of the Noise Policy Statement for England as a good overall framework for tackling noise, an independent advisory panel for noise in DEFRA, and specific targets on reducing noise pollution effectively.



7. Research into any inequalities arising from differing service provision by local authorities.

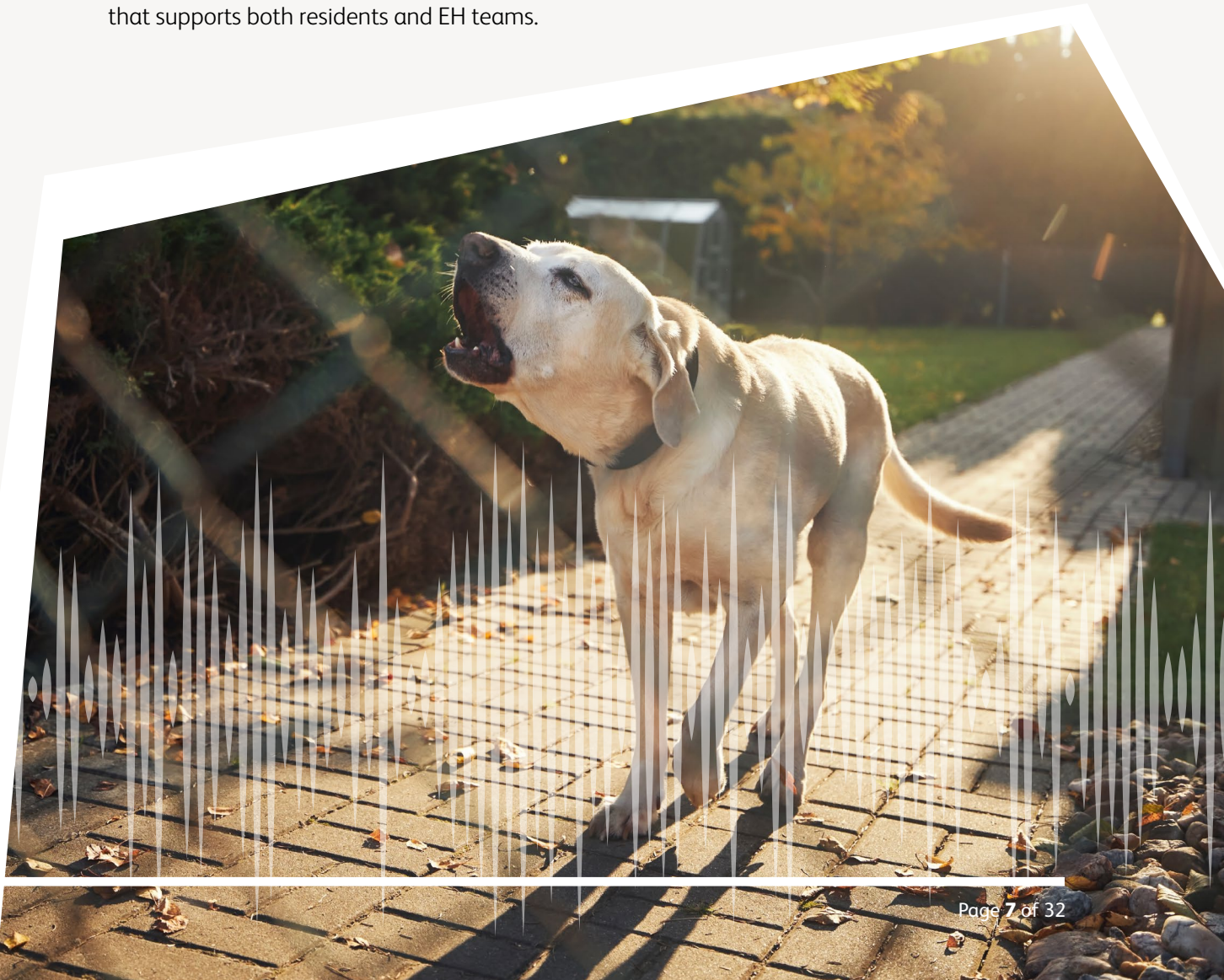
Our survey data highlighted a desire for the swift resolution of noise complaints yet our noise complaint data highlighted differences between the types of service provided by different local authorities. This highlights that there might be inequalities across different boundaries. A better understanding of topics like the provision of out of hours services and the number of EHPs employed to investigate noise complaints could help to further an evidence base and support policymakers on how to reduce noise harms.

8. Include noise as an 'Environmental Factor' when Strategic Authorities implement the new Health Inequalities Duty in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 to support reductions of noise harm in deprived communities.

Local and Strategic authorities should consider including noise as an 'Environmental Factor' within the list of general health determinants of the Health Inequalities Duty in Section 45 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026ⁱⁱ.

9. Wider take up of noise reporting applications and other technologies.

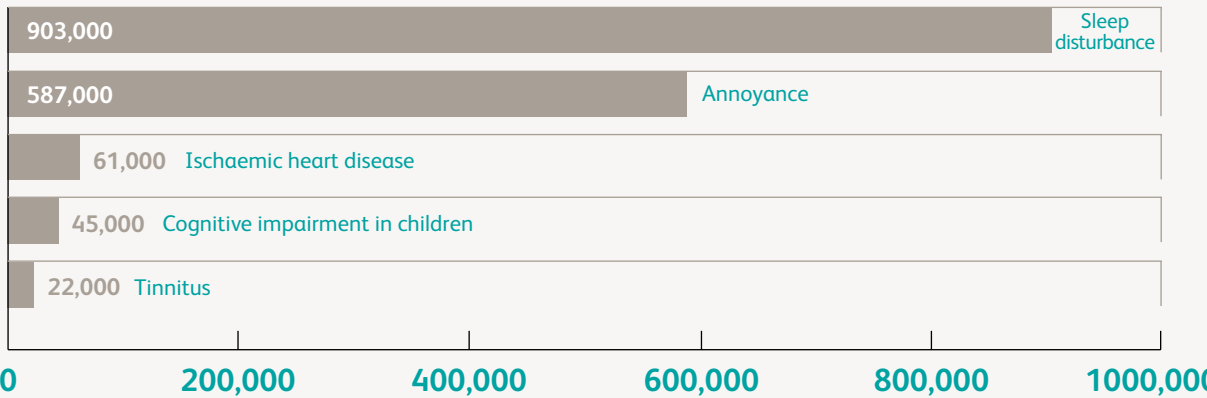
CIEH's polling indicates greater accessibility to noise complaint reporting services would improve respondents' experience in making noise complaints. Wider take up of these applications by LAs that don't yet use them could yield a more effective process that supports both residents and EH teams.



1. The state of noise harm

Environmental noise is a serious issue that impacts health and wellbeing. The World Health Organisation’s Noise Guidelines for Europe describes noise as ‘among the top environmental risks to physical and mental health and wellbeing’ and underlines that it has ‘negative impacts on human health and wellbeing and is a growing concern among both the general public and policymakers in Europe’ⁱⁱⁱ. The health risks to individuals arising from long term exposure to noise pollution include sleep disturbances and cardiovascular diseases^{iv}.

Noise is acknowledged to be an overlooked pollutant that has a consistent impact on human health. The 2022-23 House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Report outlined the current scientific understanding of noise’s impact on human health with the definition of noise as ‘unwanted sound’ broken down into pitch and volume and is the basis for how noise is measured and tackled^v. The Government response to the Lords report recognised ‘that noise is second only to poor air quality as an environmental cause of ill health in Europe, with impacts including increased risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disease, annoyance, sleep disturbance and cognitive impairment’^{vi}.



Graph 1: WHO Estimated Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) lost annually due to Environmental Noise in Western Europe^{vii}



Noise harm can be a symptom of other issues, and its impact is often inequitable.

A recent British Medical Journal article noted that reducing noise at source through legislation, planning, and engineering is generally more effective than restricting transmission. Options for noise mitigation such as insulation were less frequently open to disadvantaged groups, who were more likely to be living in lower quality housing, often in urban areas or along busy transport routes, leading to heightened exposure to neighbour, neighbourhood and environmental noise^{viii}.

The additional impact this has on people with lower quality sleep including the elderly, shift workers and pregnant women who ‘are more vulnerable to noise associated sleep disturbance’^{ix} is also significant.

CIEH’s Noise Data Briefing provided several insights into both the state of noise complaints in the calendar year they were recorded as well as the context and wider trends of previous surveys run by CIEH. The Noise Data Briefing showed a decline in the total number of complaints compared against the period immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic and as far back as 1994/5. Despite the recorded drop in total complaint numbers, noise is an issue which regularly affects a significant number of people and communities. Research for Natural Resources Wales^x indicated that 25 % of respondents have said that they regularly experience noise in their daily lives and similar polling for Specsavers shows that nearly two thirds of Britons living in cities believe their hearing is worse due to noise^{xi}.

Understanding individual noise sources and the accessibility and efficiency of the complaints process are vital to ensuring public protection from the negative impacts of environmental noise harm. It is important to consider several different elements: the current state of noise harm, what types of complaints about noise are recorded, and how, as well as what changes can be made including by LA EHPs to ensure an easier process for residents. Looking at all these elements provides a clear picture for policy makers and indicates what CIEH, partners, LAs and the UK and Welsh Governments can do to support those affected.

A Housing Ombudsman report from 2022 gives us a recent review on the state of noise exposure. The report looked at variances in service provision, including how some landlords described ‘a postcode lottery resulting from the very different budgets and equipment available to different councils for dealing with noise nuisance with some local councils not having any noise monitoring equipment and/or there being an extensive delay in that being provided with little or no communication’^{xii}. This description of a postcode lottery underlines the challenges in the current state of noise harm in England and Wales. It also supports our call for the consideration of a review into resource allocation for LA EH services that tackle noise and nuisance.

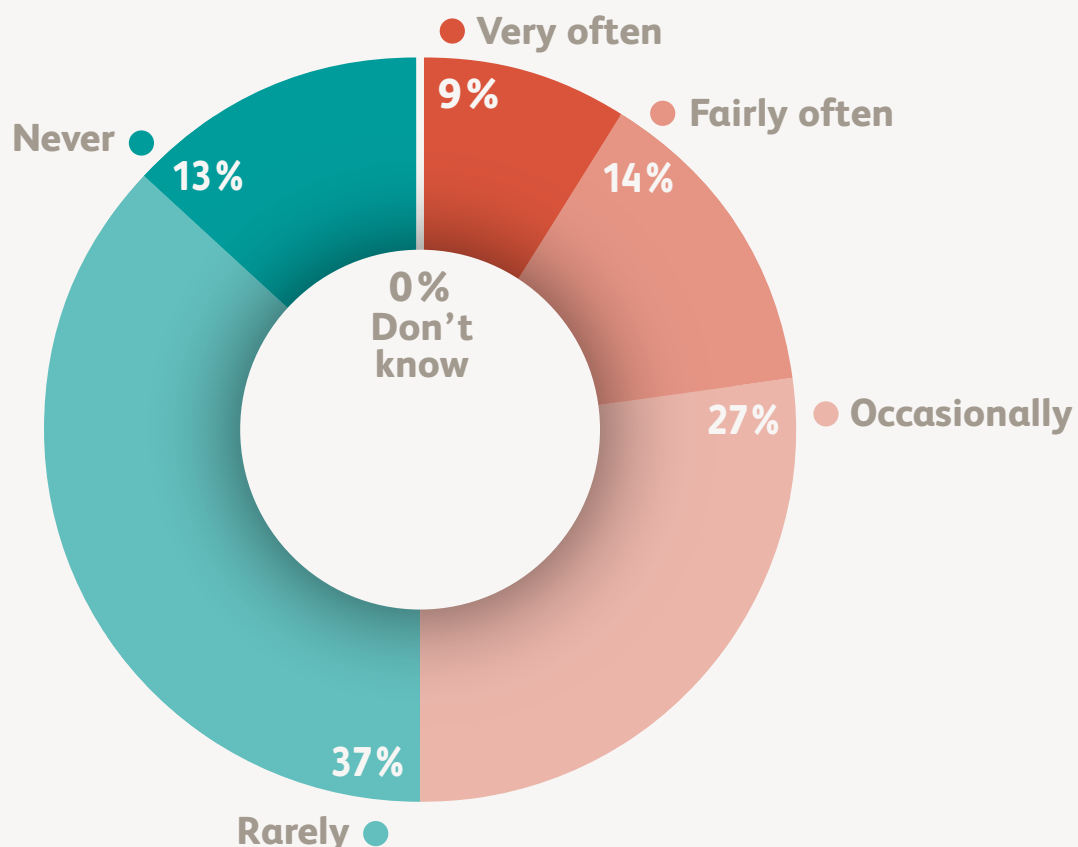
If progress is to be made in ensuring action is taken on reducing noise exposure, new sources of noise must be understood and recorded, the underlying causes of noise exposure must be addressed, and all concerned should do what they can to ensure those on the receiving end of noise exposure are supported quickly and adequately.

To understand these issues, CIEH commissioned polling from Ipsos in August 2026 including questions about exposure to noise and its effects.

Even though our previous report showed that number of complaints received by local authorities has fallen, our research found that 23 % of respondents (see Graph 2) said they had very or fairly often been disturbed by noise in the past two years, with 29 % saying it had increased in the past two years. Only 2 % of respondents reported that noise levels had dropped in the preceding two years.

An income breakdown of these numbers indicates a health inequalities dimension to noise exposure, with 29 % of respondents earning under £20,000 being disturbed by noise in their home compared to 19 % of respondents earning over £55,000. There was also a similar (if smaller gap) between those on the lowest and highest incomes on the state of noise getting worse. This disparity is shown in figures 3 and 4.

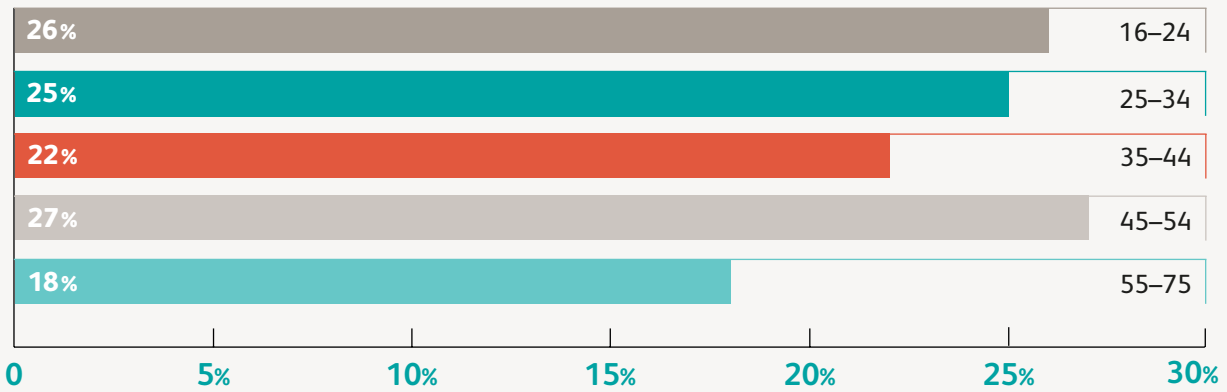
Graph 2: Respondents impacted by noise in the last two years (Base: All adults aged 16-75 in England & Wales, n=2110):



Graphs 3 and 4: Differences in age and income categories in perceived noise (n=2110):

NET: Very/fairly often

AGE



NET: Very/fairly often

INCOME

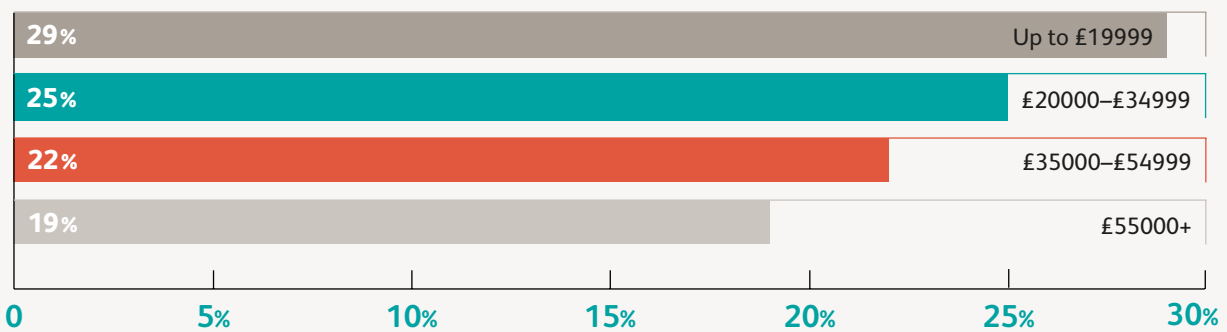


Table 1: Age and income variation (n=2110)

	AGE					INCOME			
	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–75	UP TO £19999	£20000 – £34999	£35000 – £54999	£55000+
NET: Very/fairly often	26 %	25 %	22 %	27 %	18 %	29 %	25 %	22 %	19 %
NET: Very/fairly often/occasionally	54 %	51 %	53 %	54 %	45 %	57 %	54 %	48 %	46 %
NET: Never/rarely	45 %	49 %	47 %	46 %	55 %	42 %	46 %	52 %	54 %

2. Exposure to noise

Noise emerges from human activity and natural phenomena, and not all sources of noise fall within the control of LAs. For example, transportation noise is not regulated by local authorities through statutory nuisance legislation.

Figure 2 – Noise sources

Noise source type	Examples
Industrial noise	Factories and processing facilities
Transportation noise	Road traffic, railway and aircraft noise

Figure 3 – Noise sources tackled by local authority EHPs

Noise source type	Examples
Neighbour noise	Domestic, barking dogs, loud music, alarms, power tools
Neighbourhood noise	Entertainment venues, pubs, clubs
Machinery noise	ASHPs, wind turbines

Transport noise

Government plans have increasingly seen the transport planning process as a way to manage soundscapes and reduce noise, with the 2019 Noise Action Plan for roads endorsing a variety of techniques for noise reduction including ‘traffic management schemes, such as the re-routing of traffic away from sensitive receptors, restrictions on the type of traffic (e.g. heavy vehicles) that can use certain roads at certain times of day, the design and building of new roads to provide an alternative route away from noise sensitive premises, and the introduction of speed restrictions directly or as a consequence of congestion management schemes’^{xiii}. EHPs look at the totality of potential exposure and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), for example, may in some circumstances lead to worsened air quality for some residents such as those on a scheme’s boundary, and so EHPs will tend to look at transport planning options in the round rather than singularly follow a particular policy prescription. In respect of noise, evidence shows at least 40 % of UK adults are now exposed to noise levels above 50dB LDEN leading to 97,000 disability adjusted life years lost due to road traffic (with the real impact potentially up to 2.2x higher because research used strategic noise mapping which excluded minor roads)^{xiv}.

A study into the impact of LTNs in Oxford on noise found almost all locations experienced a reduction in noise after the introduction of the LTN. The study also examined the impact on soundscapes, finding all locations except for the control location experienced a shift towards more biotic (natural) noise after the introduction of the LTN^{xv}.



Internationally, a study in Barcelona examined the effect of interventions to create more walking space^{xvi} and as a result more natural noise events were recorded. By contrast the boundaries remained dominated by higher impact traffic sounds^{xvii}.

CIEH polling has examined a wide range of noise sources that affect the public. This included those which EHPs can directly control through their use of statutory nuisance, licensing, and permitting powers. It also covered those such as aircraft and road traffic noise which EHPs can seek to control through the planning processes administered both by councils and governments.

The results found that in the past two years:

- 36 % of respondents had been exposed to road noise
- 19 % of respondents had been exposed to noise from aircraft overhead
- 7 % had been exposed to railway noise
- The total estimate of this is that 56 % of respondents have been exposed to at least one kind of transport noise.

Noise from aviation is especially important for people living under flight paths, and those who might be affected by airport expansion. The Aviation Noise Attitudes Survey and the Aviation Night Noise Effects study examine these in greater detail. The Aviation Night Noise Effects found that 24 % of respondents reported being 'bothered, disturbed or annoyed' by environmental noise in the night-time period between 11pm and 7am^{xviii} and the Aviation Noise Attitudes Survey indicated that the rate at which residents near airports experience annoyance at aircraft sound is far higher than previous surveys suggested^{xix}.

Neighbourhood noise

Regarding neighbour and neighbourhood noise that EHPs tackle, the CIEH polling found:

- 38 % of respondents had experienced animal noise
- 36 % had experienced noise from neighbours in a different building
- 30 % had experienced noise from parties or social gatherings.
- 57 % had experienced some kind of social and/or neighbour noise.

These findings indicate that a majority of the public has experienced exposure to at least one variety of noise source, while a sizeable proportion of the population perceives that the problem has worsened where they live. To tackle the noise exposure faced by some communities, therefore, it is important to understand both existing and emerging sources of noise. Given a discrepancy between the falling complaint numbers and CIEH's polling, it is crucial also to consider how those complaints are recorded and categorised.

There is a need for EH teams to be able to effectively record and respond to emerging noise sources and the risks they pose to public health and wellbeing. These new sources come about from decarbonisation efforts, with greater numbers of ASHPs, as well as from social factors including a larger prevalence of short term let properties. CIEH included a question in the 2024/25 data set asking LAs whether they record these emerging noise sources on their databases.

The responses showed a mixed picture. Most emerging sources requested had relatively low total numbers including Domestic Battery Storage Systems which caused 27 complaints and wind turbines which caused only 17 complaints across England and Wales. Other emerging sources caused more complaints including ASHPs causing 103 complaints, and houses alleged or proven to have been rented out as a short term let or a holiday let causing 326 complaints to be logged across England and Wales. Even the highest numbers here however are still not a cause for concern when considered as a complaint total per million and as a total proportion of noise complaints^{xx}.

Emerging technical sources of noise can be influenced by wider government policies regarding energy generation, including a greater emphasis on onshore wind and support for purchasing ASHPs. As a result, raising awareness of potential noise risks from these sources is vital especially to inform location, guidance on installation and maintenance of these emerging sources.

Emerging social sources of noise can be influenced by changing uses of residential properties such as the rise of short term let properties. This must be a consideration in registration frameworks around short term lets, particularly when there is a heightened risk of affecting neighbours. This raises the question whether landlords and renting agents could highlight to short term letting websites through reviews or other processes when short term let guests create excessive noise. This reporting would aim to disincentivise anti-social activity that affects the health and wellbeing of permanent residents. With ambitious Government housebuilding targets, including an increased number of office and industrial buildings converted to residential use, it is important to keep noise as a key consideration in the planning and alcohol licensing processes to stop preventable noise exposure from affecting residents.¹

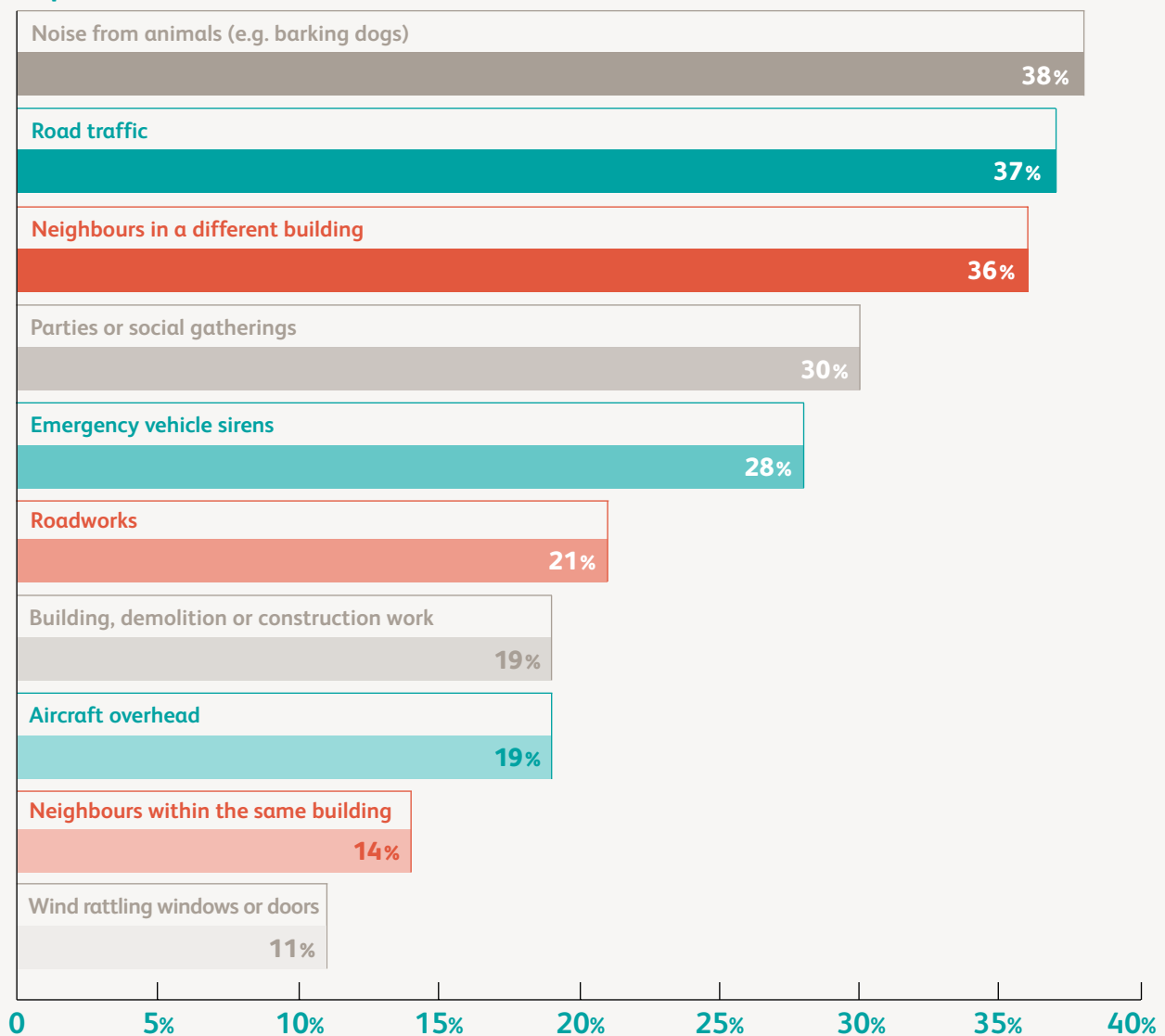
As better data in this area will enable policy makers to assess the scale of impact of new noise sources and to provide the most up to date guidance to EHPs on resolving noise complaints, CIEH are happy to work with partners to establish more consistent record-keeping across LAs. If these emerging sources' complaint numbers remain stable and low, then there is a clear indication that sufficient work has and is being done to minimise preventative noise and to improve public health and wellbeing against noise exposure.

¹ The reasons for the relatively low numbers for these complaints include the data on these sources being unavailable from some local authorities, including 112 who responded to CIEH's FOI who couldn't provide information on at least one source, with 85 areas especially lacking data on Air Source Heat Pumps. This was in part because some local authority databases lack the ability to search for these cases other than manually, so these numbers may all be higher than the above numbers suggest.

CIEH's poll indicated similar numbers and sentiment to those related to emerging sources in CIEH's Noise Complaint Data Briefing published in March 2026. Only 1 % of respondents to the Ipsos poll reported experiencing noise from wind turbines, and only 2 % reported experiencing noise from an ASHP. Whilst the percentage who experienced noise from social gatherings and neighbours was higher (30 % and 45 %), it wasn't possible to determine how many stemmed from short term let properties (see graph 5 below). However, the Noise Complaint Data Briefing numbers saw the most complaints from emerging sources come from short term lets, although these were still relatively low numbers compared to more traditional noise sources^{xxi}.

Graph 5: Top 10 noise sources from CIEH Ipsos polling (August 2026) (n = 1845 weighted base)

Top 10: Noise sources



3. What is currently recorded?

CIEH has been conducting surveys of local authority noise reports since the 1970s. CIEH is privileged that many LAs have used previous CIEH surveys' list of noise categories as a template for their own databases' lists of noise sources. Whilst several authorities responding to CIEH's FOI request said that they don't record a breakdown of noise complaints by noise source, the vast majority do. 83 % of responding authorities indicated that they record noise by source to some degree so introducing consistent coding would not be creating a new database statistic for most councils in England and Wales.

As mentioned previously, there are multiple sources of noise registered in noise complaints by local authority officers. For example, in the region of South West England, 16 out of 21 councils which responded to CIEH's FOI request confirmed that they did record a breakdown of noise complaints by noise source. However, when examining the lists of noise sources recorded by different councils, a large variation of the types and number of noise sources they record on their databases can be noted. For example, one council has 20 different noise codes for different noise sources that are recorded as noise complaints. A second council however records only 12 noise source categories in their data, a third records 9 noise source categories and a fourth doesn't record specific breakdowns of noise by source but rather has four broad categories of domestic, commercial, construction and industrial.

While the noise source categories in each of these LAs do collectively capture all noise complaints made by people in their areas, this does leave finding underlying causes of noise, particularly on a national scale, a difficult proposition. Figure 4 gives an example of coding inconsistencies.

Figure 4 – inconsistent coding of noise sources

Councils in the South West of England reported inconsistent categories for recording complaints about ASHPs. For instance, one council in the region lists ASHPs as 'Noise (Domestic)', a second lists them as 'Noise Domestic Disturbance', a third lists them as 'Noise – Low Frequency', a fourth lists them as 'Domestic Noise' and a fifth as 'Machinery fixed'.

Whilst there is a general overlap, this does make getting exact numbers on noise sources difficult at the national level and so creates an issue for policy makers when trying to see overall increases or decreases in noise complaints by source^{xxii}.



A crucial reason these statistics are important is that many councils are undergoing restructuring processes which will involve combining their databases with others' as they are reorganised into unitary authorities. Many of the councils mentioned above are in this category. This raises an issue as neighbouring councils will have to decide on one set of coding. It also offers an opportunity for new unitary authorities to be given a national list of consistent codes for noise sources.



4. How we record noise complaints: now and next

The way in which members of the public make complaints about noise and the ability of Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) to have a platform to effectively receive and respond to complaints by urgency and priority is crucial to tackling noise nuisance, as well as managing service users' expectations. The public now expects to use phones to interact with other public services so use of a website or app to record noise and submit noise complaints is an opportunity to digitise and improve efficiency for residents and EHPs. CIEH asked LAs whether they make an app available to residents for recording and making noise complaints. Nearly half of LAs (47.96 %) reported using an app and in those 141 areas, 13,874 users were recorded^{xxiii}. If there were an increase in usage of apps or of similar technology, then this might lead to an easier and more efficient method for residents to make complaints and feel that they are effectively acted upon. There may also be reduced processing costs.

CIEH's polling also indicates there is currently a lack of awareness of noise complaint services by the public. Only 9 % of respondents said they had reported a noise complaint to their local council with 90 % saying they never had. Of the small number who did make a complaint, 31 % said that the council had helped to resolve their complaint.

Example of EH action: resolving an ASHP noise complaint in Carmarthenshire

Officers from the Pollution Team at Carmarthenshire County Council responded to a noise complaint from a resident living in a block of flats. The complaint related to an ASHP installed at the base of the building which, together with other plant and machinery, was generating significant noise affecting nearby residents.

Noise monitoring and acoustic assessments confirmed that elevated noise levels remained despite remedial works having been undertaken by the operator. Following discussions with the operator and presentation of monitoring evidence, including frequency analysis data, officers were able to secure a resolution through informal action. The operator agreed that the affected accommodation would no longer be used as residential living quarters, and it was subsequently repurposed for staff use.

This case demonstrates the important role Environmental Health Practitioners play in investigating noise complaints under Section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, gathering and assessing evidence, and working with stakeholders to achieve practical solutions through informal action where appropriate.

CIEH's polling also asked respondents what measures they would like to have implemented to improve the complaints process. As shown in table 3, among the highest numbers were the ability to report noise online (32 %), the option to report anonymously (31 %), greater confidence that action will be taken by the council (28 %) and updates on what action is being taken (27 %). Overall numbers do indicate support for greater ease in reporting with 59 % of respondents supporting reporting flexibility and accessibility. This indicates that use of technology in reporting is something the public would support to improve the reporting process, with 18 % of respondents also believing a dedicated app would help to resolve the issue.

35 % of women said they would prefer to report complaints anonymously compared to 26 % of men which was by far the biggest difference of opinion by gender and potentially raises questions about service access.

Table 3: Popular options to improve service access and noise complaint reporting (n=2110)

	Total percentage of survey respondents who expressed interest in this
The ability to report the noise online	32%
The option to report anonymously	31%
Greater confidence in the action the council will take	28%
Updates on what action is being taken	27%
Faster response times from the council for resolving the issue	25%
The ability to track the progress of a complaint	24%
Clearer information about how to make the complaint	23%
Better information about what types of noise can be reported	22%
The ability to upload evidence of the noise (e.g. audio recordings, videos, photos)	20%
More information about what happens after the complaint is submitted	20%
The ability to report noise issues via email	19%
A dedicated mobile app for reporting the noise	18%
The ability to speak directly with a council representative	17%
A dedicated telephone helpline for noise disturbance or annoyance	15%
Longer opening hours for reporting the noise OR the ability to report noise outside normal office hours	13%
The ability to report noise issues via live web chat or AI assistant	11%
Support available in different languages	3%





5. What should be recorded?

CIEH recommends that the UK and Welsh governments offer consistent coding categories that are easily updatable for inclusion of new sources as they emerge. This would be informed by local authorities reporting emerging sources based on residents' noise complaints from various noise sources.

Responding authorities may also have recorded complaints from these sources in broader categories (e.g. Fixed Machinery Noise for ASHPs) but would not be able to search for it other than manually on their database. This is also an example of the limits of the level of data that a private individual and organisation can access through both voluntary surveys (as CIEH has done previously) and compulsory FOI requests (as done this time) and indicates that, as suggested in the House of Lords report^{xxiv}, it may be necessary for the UK and Welsh Governments to directly collect this data at some point in the future, in particular for England regarding the use of the Noise Policy Statement for England.

Codes in current use have arisen often as a result of previous CIEH surveys, but as they have diverged in terms of their wider usage and individual inputs, it is timely to convene a discussion on reintegration and a laying out of a consistently agreed set of codes as well as the underlying guidance on how types of complaints should be coded. This will best allow policy makers to observe changes in total complaints by noise source as a proxy measure for health impacts (as is done by OHID) and give them a better ability to introduce and monitor targeted policy interventions designed to reduce complaint numbers from these sources and to reduce noise exposure as a whole. LGR in many parts of England occurring now presents both a challenge and an opportunity to introduce consistent coding of noise sources as new unitary authorities move toward amalgamated databases.

Our previous report covered whether LAs' databases are able to add additional noise categories, with over 92% of responding councils saying that they do have this capability^{xxv}. Several LAs CIEH has spoken with during this project are currently considering this capability and CIEH is of the view that there are multiple approaches to achieve a nationally agreed list of codes. If the UK Government and the Welsh Government, in consultation with LAs and other noise policy stakeholders, set out a national list of codes for LAs, particularly for those undergoing LGR and merging databases, to adopt over a longer period of time, then future noise data briefings could reflect more consistency. In addition, over time local authority noise teams would be more likely to adapt their databases to this list without being forced to adopt them over a short period of time and a clean, useful and future-proof noise database could be produced.

While a requirement for all English LAs to adjust to a national code structure in a short period of time is not a viable option, this could also be phased in at different stages, with new unitary councils adopting the codes to their new databases first and other council areas being given a longer time period to make the change. In the meantime, this would make collecting noise complaint data by noise source

numbers increasingly easy and would allow the stakeholders to access this information in a more timely way and lead to improved data over time as more councils adopt the list of noise categories to their database.

Wider usage of technology for recording and reporting purposes would also be a useful advantage for residents experiencing noise nuisance and for Environmental Health Practitioners reviewing and responding to noise complaints. In Wales 21 out of 22 LAs use an app for residents to make complaints (this single local authority has an alternative solution in place), ensuring all Welsh councils make it possible for local residents to make noise complaints digitally.





6. How do we reduce noise harms?

CIEH believes that the best way to reduce the harm noise causes in terms of people's health and wellbeing is through three areas:

Reduction at source

Thanks to its members, CIEH can mobilise expert evidence and advice for developing guidance on existing and emerging sources of noise, such as ASHPs. One recent example of this is the joint Domestic Air Source Heat Pumps Professional Advice Note (2026) which was developed via collaboration between expert members of both the CIEH and the Institute of Acoustics (IoA) and approved by both bodies^{xxvi}. Guidance like this enables best practice in installation and maintenance of new technologies and emerging sources of noise and so supports reduction of noise pollution at its source.

CIEH members who reviewed the data from the Noise Data Briefing remarked that planning is a central issue in reducing noise at source. They were concerned that new or converted housing is not always sufficiently noise insulated, and felt that there is a need for better alignment between planning, public health, environmental health and enforcement, and called for clearer government guidance on tackling noise in the planning process.

Limited planning controls were also an issue raised by CIEH members as a reason for why short term lets are difficult to tackle and so there is a need for a discussion on stronger regulatory framework in this area as well.

Reduction of wider causes

The House of Lords report makes several recommendations that are not yet implemented. The Noise Policy Statement for England (NPSE) is listed by the report as something in need of being updated with the latest evidence to focus on implementation^{xxvii}. CIEH believes that the recommendations from the House of Lords Neglected Pollutants report would be a good place to start, including consideration of their listed research priorities, reemphasis of the NPSE as a good overall framework for tackling noise, DEFRA collection or delegation of collection of data to demonstrate appropriate interface between national policy and local policy, an independent advisory panel for noise in DEFRA, UK Government collection of data to determine whether planning authorities are making use of the NPSE and specific targets on noise reduction, would all make strong progress in tackling these wider determinants of health. CIEH believes the data and evidence analysed in this report further support the recommendations made by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, such as consistent coding supporting setting targets on noise reduction and data gathering through FOI supporting the call for the UK and Welsh Governments to gather local level data.

The recommendation from the Lords Report on DEFRA collecting data ‘to determine whether planning authorities and other relevant parties are making use of the NPSE’^{xxviii} is a valid point of investigation too. Collecting this data on noise and having clear target metrics, such as number of complaints from individual sources, must be part of reducing overall noise harm. CIEH collected data on the number of planning applications with 27,436 in total reported from respondents^{xxix}.

The need for government action on exposure to noise and on improving our knowledge of noise sources is vital given the impacts noise has on health inequalities in the UK. Research from University College London indicates a correlation between more deprived cities and regions and higher numbers of noise complaints^{xxx} with negative relationships between noise complaints and various deprivation factors including health, employment, barriers to housing and living environment^{xxxi} and makes the conclusion that:

‘areas with higher rates of people who die prematurely or whose quality of life is impaired by poor health or who are disabled are likely to report more noise issues’^{xxxii}.

Given the often neglected but deeply serious impact of noise exposure on public health especially on deprived communities, it is vital that action is taken to reduce wider causes of noise harm.

CIEH is aware of the need for further research in several areas of noise that have been raised by this year’s survey, a key one being the planning process and preventable noise related to housing. Planning is an area with a clear ability to ensure reductions in preventable noise harm. Recommendations from the report including reducing the proportion of the population exposed to a level of noise^{xxxiii} would also be beneficial. Whilst there is an acknowledgement that everything should be done to reduce noise at source, good acoustic design is also key to mitigating preventable noise, particularly for residential development^{xxxiv}. Determinations on where cost effective retrofits are the right option should be explored as well^{xxxv}.

The need for more consistent coding is a key theme of this report and is particularly stark in the context of health inequalities. Consistent coding would allow better measurability of individual noise source reduction. CIEH recommends that individual noise source reductions are added to future noise reduction plans in line with the recommendations of the Lords report. However the data is collected, consistent coding would be very helpful in ensuring measurable delivery. The better the data policy makers have on noise complaints and their sources, the better policy interventions can be targeted, especially in reducing health inequalities in areas of deprivation and poor levels of health that research indicates tend to have higher noise complaint numbers.

The importance of noise as a public health issue does imply that greater linkages should be made between environmental health teams tackling noise complaints and public health (PH) teams.



LGR provides an opportunity to strengthen the ties between EH and PH teams whether through closer reporting of work or with the two teams being located in the same directorate. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act also offers a unique opportunity for this link up across Strategic Authority regions. The Act's Health Inequalities Duty requires Foundation and Mayoral Strategic Authorities to reduce health inequalities between people within their region. Among its list of general health determinants set out in Clause 45 of the Act is 'Environmental Factors'. Whilst the list of environmental factors doesn't include noise, it does include other EH local government responsibilities including Air Quality and the Government has established that the general health determinants list is not exhaustive and that strategic authorities are able to decide which health determinants to additionally include for their local areas^{xxxvi}.

With this in mind CIEH believes that strategic authorities should consider inclusion of noise in the list of general health determinants for their areas as they plan to implement the health inequalities duty. CIEH believes that LA EH teams reporting stats and indicators on the state of noise harms and enforcement in their council area to their LA Director of Public Health who in turn feed them into their Strategic Authority's health lead to be included in mayors' plans for planning tracking and reporting on noise harms and how to reduce them as part of an overall reduction of regional health inequalities.

Quick resolution of noise issues

Whilst every local authority is different, CIEH's findings indicate that some kind of application that enables easy reporting of noise complaints and supports local authority EHPs in logging and responding to complaints may be a benefit to this. With 43 % of responding authorities not currently providing an app option to their residents to make complaints, this highlights room for an improvement that residents might find easy to engage with, and thus an innovation that councils could make that may have a big impact on local residents' satisfaction with noise reporting services.

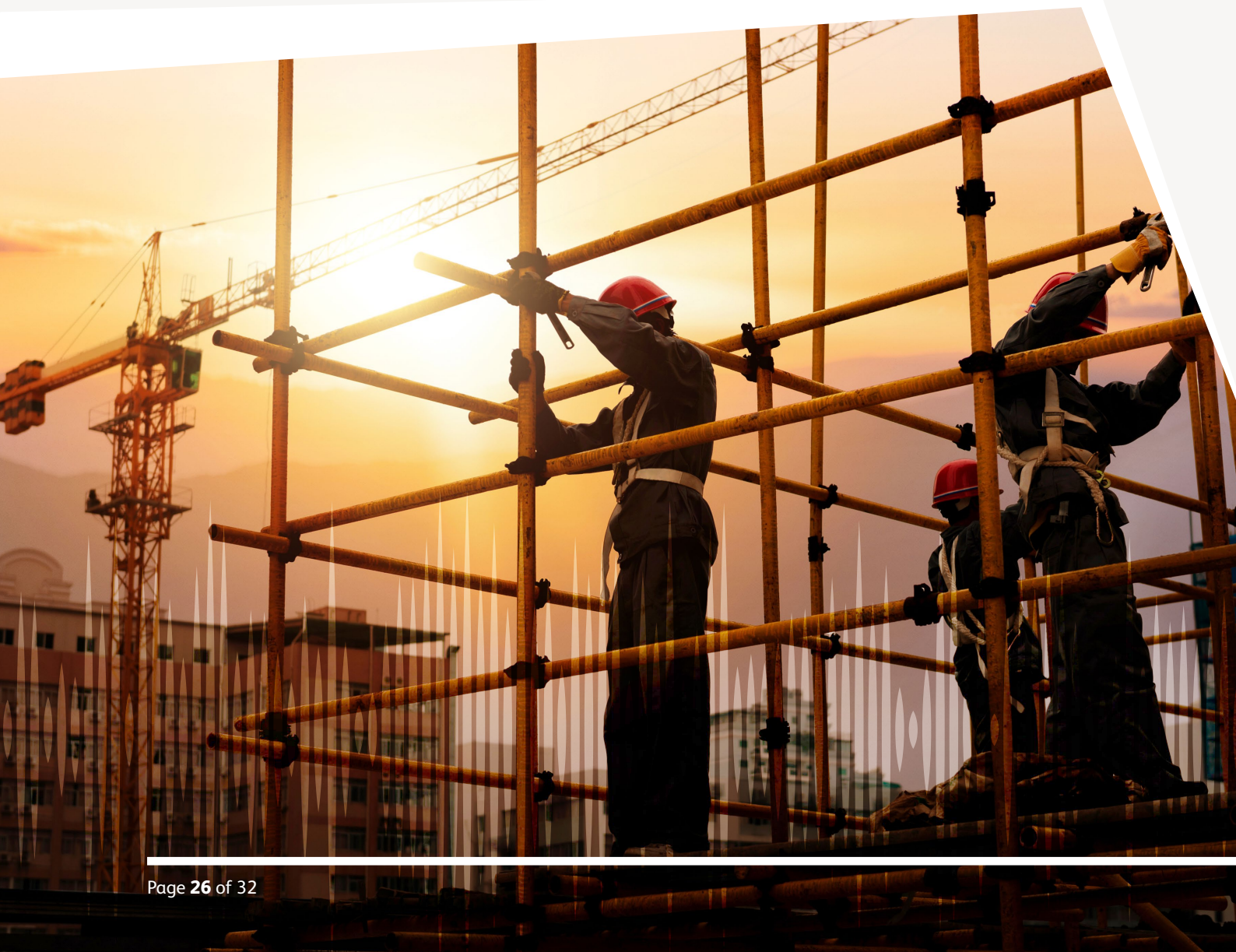
CIEH's Ipsos findings also indicate that, as listed previously in table 3, 18 % of respondents supported a dedicated mobile app for reporting the noise and 20 % supported the ability to upload evidence of the noise including audio recordings, videos and photos. Collectively, 59 % of respondents supported flexibility and accessibility in reporting noise complaints which CIEH believes technology including apps support.

As previously indicated, further research into the provision of out of hours services (i.e. beyond 17:00 and before 09:00) could be undertaken to identify their impact on total complaint numbers and the level of need for them in less densely populated areas.

Methodology

CIEH used a Freedom of Information Request to ask for data from LAs in England and Wales related to their total complaint numbers, coding and surrounding information. CIEH subsequently commissioned polling from Ipsos, asking questions about public opinion on noise to supplement a literature review of this policy area. CIEH also consulted with its members and stakeholders in two separate webinars to gather insights and inputs from others on the trends from the gathered data and what direction CIEH should take with this report.

For CIEH, Ipsos interviewed a representative quota sample of 2,110 adults aged 16-75 in England and Wales using its online i:omnibus between 7 and 12 August 2026. The sample obtained is representative of the population with quotas on age, gender, region and working status. The data has been weighted to the known offline population proportions for age and working status within gender, and for government office region, social grade and education, to reflect the adult population of the United Kingdom. This methodology does not include Scotland or Northern Ireland within scope.





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Thank you to stakeholders in the UK and Welsh Government Civil Services and in the third and business sectors who informed our new data set and helped us to update it for the medium and long term. We hope our report and its recommendations help to support the vital work of these departments in tackling noise pollution.

Thank you to our members who have been vital to this project from the beginning. We are grateful to the local authority members who supplied us with data and the several who attended our input webinar for members to give their thoughts on different insights from our data briefing. We'd like to give particular thanks to our Noise Advisory Panel who have reviewed this project from its beginning and this report itself.

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