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Understanding Change in Pub Noise Regulation: A Mixed-Methods Study of Complaints, Enforcement and Officer Interpretation in the West Midlands.

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Declaration

This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the BSc (Hons) Environmental Health Practitioner at University Centre Weston in partnership with The University of the West of England.

I certify that the dissertation is the original work of the author. Where the work and ideas of other authors have been used, these are fully referenced.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Jordan', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Signed: Anna Jordan

Date: 22nd April 2026

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Abstract

COVID-19 forced widespread lockdowns across the UK, closing night-time economy (NTE) premises such as pubs. As restrictions eased, many pubs relocated live and recorded music to external areas to comply with public health measures. Post-COVID-19 this practice continued, contributing to increased pub-related noise complaints (Night Time Industries Association, 2024). The World Health Organization (2024) identifies environmental noise as a leading risk to physical and mental well-being, with irregular and high-intensity noise from pubs constituting a significant and often under-recognised public health concern.

This study assessed how noise complaints, enforcement actions, and the use of statutory powers relating to pub noise in West Midlands (WM) Local Authorities (LA) changed between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, and how officers explained and interpreted these changes. A mixed-method approach was applied, with 30 WM LAs contacted via Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and officers invited to complete a questionnaire on their perceptions of pub-related noise. FOI data and closed-questionnaire responses provided quantitative insight through descriptive analysis, while open-questionnaire responses and interviews with LA noise officers offered qualitative interpretation through thematic analysis.

Results identified an increase in noise complaints by 69% across responding LAs. Although the total number of enforcement actions remained the same, the types of actions shifted post-COVID-19. Officers reported external noise from pubs becoming more prominent and identified the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as the legislation most commonly used to investigate. Interviews with three officers expanded these insights, identifying themes relating to the use of external areas, financial pressures, legislative impacts, investigative approaches, and wider societal changes. The study concluded that COVID-19 influenced changes in pub-related noise and regulatory practice. Recommendations include promoting community engagement, strengthening officer training to reduce inconsistencies in practice and reviewing the role of the planning process in noise management.

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1. Introduction

In March 2020, COVID-19 forced widespread lockdowns across the UK, closing night-time economy (NTE) premises such as pubs. As restrictions relaxed, fewer pubs reopened, with BBPA (2023) reporting “47,200” active UK pubs in 2019, but only “45,350 pubs reopened by 2023” following COVID-19. To comply with remaining public health measures, many relocated live and recorded music to their external areas. By early 2022, all COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and communities underwent a gradual re-establishment of social and economic activity. Many pubs continued to utilise their external areas for entertainment, as a result, there was an increase in pub-related noise complaints from residents. This was evidenced by Night Time Industries Association (2024) which outlined a “53% rise in noise complaints in London from 2018 to 2022/23”, therefore setting the foundations for potential noise challenges for Local Authorities (LAs) to regulate.

1.1 Health Effects of Noise

Noise is defined by Fink (2020) as “unwanted and/or harmful sound,” expanding the traditional definition by explicitly including “harmful” to emphasise its potential adverse effects beyond a simple disturbance. As outlined in Babisch’s (2002) noise effects reaction schema, noise exposure initiates physiological and psychological responses that influence health through direct and indirect pathways. Stress and sleep disruption are immediate consequences, but these short-term effects can develop into more substantial health impacts. Long-term exposure can amplify these risks, as prolonged activation of stress pathways affects biological factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol and other key systems. Over time, these changes increase susceptibility to cardiovascular disease, demonstrating the significant physical health implications of noise exposure. In addition, noise can also affect psychological wellbeing. A systematic review by Gong et al., (2022) indicates that high levels of noise annoyance is associated with increased risks of depression, anxiety, and lower overall mental health. This reinforces that chronic noise exposure carries not only physiological risks but also a broader mental health burden.

Environmental noise is becoming increasingly recognised as a global public health issue. According to The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) environmental noise is “one of the leading environmental risks for physical and mental health and well-being.” This includes noise from traffic, industry and amplified music used for leisure activities. What distinguishes leisure noise from more continuous sources such as road traffic, is its unpredictability which can heighten activation of the nervous system and trigger the human fight or flight response. Evidence from a Switzerland study (Héritier et al., 2017) shows that exposure to intermittent noise events that stand out from background levels, particularly those with distinct noise peaks, are strongly associated with adverse cardiovascular outcomes. This pattern of irregular, high-intensity noise makes leisure noise, such as that generated by pubs, bars and similar premises, a significant and often underestimated public health risk.

1.2 Legislation

Noise regulations in England are primarily governed by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA 1990), providing statutory nuisance powers and duties to LAs. The Licensing Act 2003 also provides statutory licensing powers to regulate premises such as pubs. Additional tools are established through the Noise Act 1996, the Live Music Act 2012 (which amended the existing licensing regime) and the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Crime and Policing Act 2014. These provisions offer LAs several pathways for responding to pub-related noise, with application often shaped by the nature of the disturbance and local procedures. However, post-COVID-19 patterns of pub use may challenge the practical application of long-standing statutory powers, raising questions about how effectively current legislation supports LAs in managing pub-related noise.

1.3 Post-COVID-19 Noise Changes

COVID-19 created an unprecedented period of reduced environmental noise, placing LAs in unfamiliar territory when regulating noise. During lockdowns, everyday activities came to a standstill, resulting in levels of quiet that many residents had not previously experienced. Over time, the prolonged quietness may have altered expectations of typical baseline noise levels. When restrictions were lifted, businesses, particularly within the NTE, sought to recover by expanding activities such as live music and outdoor events. For some residents, the return of these sounds may have been perceived as more intrusive, raising the possibility of reduced

tolerance to noise exposure. In this context, enforcement approaches may need to consider both changes in business operations and evolving resident expectations. Noise regulation remains essential for protecting public health and wellbeing, ensuring that noise does not pose a significant risk. With evidence suggesting an increase in noise abatement notices from “34 in 2018 to 51 in 2022/23” (NTIA, 2024), LAs face new challenges post-COVID-19. Balancing regulatory capacity with the recovery of the NTE, while also minimising impacts on local communities, may expose potential limitations within existing regulatory frameworks.

1.4 Purpose of this Study

This study aims to examine how pub-related noise complaints and LAs enforcement of noise regulations have shifted between the pre-COVID-19 period (2018–2019) and post-COVID-19 (2022–2023). This will include the type of enforcement actions, as well as how LA officers perceive noise issues and their ability to manage them in a post-COVID-19 context. By analysing these changes, the research aims to address how enforcement practices may have evolved between the two periods identified.

The West Midlands (WM) region provides the geographical focus for this study, offering a mix of densely populated urban areas and sparse rural settings. Pubs are distributed across its cities, towns and villages and form a key part of the region’s social and economic profile. In 2020, 3,485 pubs were operating in the WM region, representing a 29% decline since 2001 (House of Commons Library, 2023). This long-term reduction is relevant as changes in the size and distribution of the pub sector can influence patterns of noise complaints and the pressures placed on remaining venues. As pubs consolidate into fewer locations, noise issues may become more concentrated, shaping how LAs apply existing noise and licensing legislation. Focusing on this region also provides a localised perspective that reflects wider national trends and highlights how local settings influence pub-related noise. The variety of LAs within the region further enables examination of how different councils apply current noise and licensing legislation.

1.5 Research Question and Objectives

This study is structured around the following primary research question:

How have noise complaints, enforcement actions, and the use of statutory powers relating to pub noise in WM LAs changed between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, and how do LA officers explain and interpret these changes.

To facilitate this analysis, the study focuses on the following objectives:

- What are the variations in noise complaints and enforcement actions related to pubs across selected WM LAs between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023.
- How do LA officers perceive the changes in noise-related issues and enforcement post-COVID-19.
- How enforcement procedures and statutory powers relating to pub-related noise were used across the two periods, and how these practices correspond with relevant legislative requirements.

To address these objectives, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data from noise complaints and enforcement actions for 2018–2019 and 2022–2023 will be gathered from WM LAs. Qualitative data from officers involved in noise enforcement and licensing will provide both numerical insights and experienced perspectives on pub-related noise post-COVID-19.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Search Strategy

A structured literature review was undertaken using an adapted Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). This framework was used to support the identification, screening, inclusion and exclusion of relevant sources as a transparent and replicable search approach. Google Scholar and EBSCO databases were used, with initial search terms included noise enforcement, licensed premises, NTE and COVID-19. Broad results required refining the search strings, so Boolean operators were used to combine key terms (e.g., 'noise complaints' OR 'statutory nuisance' AND 'pandemic'). Full search strings are provided in Appendix A.

The title and abstract from each source were screened, resulting in 104 records from Google Scholar and 16 from EBSCO. From the 120 records, 15 duplicates were removed, leaving 105 for full text article screening. All records were reviewed and filtered, taking into consideration the accessibility of the article, its relevance to the research topic, and year of publication. Of these, 80 records were excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. This resulted in 33 articles to be included in the review, factoring in the additional of 8 sources identified from non-database searches and grey literature. These remaining articles offered significant insight into various aspects of the research topic. A PRISMA flow diagram is provided in Appendix B. While each literature source contributed relevant perspectives, none addressed the full scope of the research aims. This revealed gaps in the evidence relating to this study and informed the key themes explored in the literature review.

2.2 Pre-COVID-19

Pre- COVID-19 research provides an important insight into environmental noise conditions and establishes a baseline for noise levels. Tong and Kang's (2021) England-based study analysed noise complaints in relation to population density, finding that mixed-use urban areas experienced significantly higher complaint levels. Their data was sourced from 2011 Public Health Records and therefore not representative of noise issues at the time of publication, however, the study remains useful by highlighting how population density and mixed-use settings can influence noise patterns. Its further emphasis on planning and urban development

does however shift the focus away from the specific dynamics of pub-related noise, which limits its direct relevance to this research.

A comparable quantitative study by Asensio et al., (2018) examined leisure-related noise complaints in Málaga, finding noise levels exceeded Spain's 55 dBA limit and were closely linked to nightlife activity. It demonstrates how city-centre hotspots associated with bars and restaurants can contribute to increased noise exposure, providing a valuable insight for this research. Similar to Tong and Kang, both studies rely on complaint and measurement data without specifying noise sources, limiting their usefulness for targeted enforcement. They also do not provide qualitative perspectives from residents or LAs, leaving a gap in understanding that is relevant to this research. Mahapa (2016) addresses some of these limitations through a mixed-methods approach, combining noise measurements with resident questionnaires to examine environmental noise from nightclubs and restaurant bars in Melville, Johannesburg. With a night-time limit of 40 dB, noise levels exceeded the threshold 87% of the time and residents reported significant sleep disturbances. It remains relevant by illustrating how leisure venues can generate persistent night-time noise and the impact this has on nearby residents. However, while it identifies weaknesses in existing enforcement policies, it does not include the perspectives of enforcement officers. This reflects a wider limitation the present research seeks to address by gathering both enforcement data and officer views. Although conducted outside the UK, these studies demonstrate that leisure-related noise from pubs, bars and night-time venues was a recognised issue before COVID-19 and provide a useful foundation for examining how patterns changed during and after.

2.3 COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19

The emergence of COVID-19 prompted research examining how restrictions, closures and phased reopening impacted environmental noise levels. Shaw and McCullough's (2023) study found no significant increase in noise complaints in Northern Ireland, although their analysis was limited to a single LA. While their work is comparable in scale and timeframe to the present study, its narrow geographical focus highlights the value of examining multiple LAs within a defined region.

Alías and Ma. Alsina-pagès (2022) and Michaud et al., (2022) found that noise levels decreased during COVID-19 restrictions, with quantitative data indicating a shift in annoyance from external to internal sources. Increased time at home and reduced traffic made internal noise more noticeable, heightening resident sensitivity and mental health impacts. Yildirim and Aref (2021) reported similar trends but emphasised changes in the types of noise being reported. Their mixed-methods design offers broader insight into changing noise experiences during COVID-19, although reliance on self-reported complaints introduces subjectivity. Trudeau et al., (2023) presents a similar methodological approach and found increased internal noise complaints among residents working from home in Montreal. The study illustrates how home-working influenced noise tolerance after COVID-19 and provides factors that may be relevant to this research.

Cueto et al., (2023) provide further insight through a post-COVID-19 assessment of environmental noise, developing a GIS-based tool to help enforcement officers identify and manage noise from outdoor leisure activities in Spain. Although limited to a single case study, the research highlights a notable trend of the increased use of outdoor leisure spaces as a direct consequence of COVID-19. This is particularly relevant to the present study, as it evidences the shift of music and leisure activities into external areas and the associated rise in noise disturbance. Whilst there are inconsistencies across studies of reported noise complaints, they collectively demonstrate how COVID-19 reshaped noise patterns and complaint behaviour.

2.4 Pubs as Emerging Music Spaces

Pubs and other licensed premises represent a distinct category within environmental noise research, shaped by their distribution, music practices, and community impact. The distribution of pubs has shifted over time, with Clark et al., (2023) reporting the decline in rural pub numbers but increase in towns and cities between 2014 and 2022. Although the study offers limited explanation for these patterns and does not address the influence of COVID-19, it is relevant for this study suggesting that urban pubs may be adapting to changing leisure preferences and increasing their role as music and entertainment spaces.

Alternatively, research from Rozbicka et al., (2022) focuses on Birmingham's live music ecology during COVID-19, finding that restrictions significantly reduced live music capacity and threatened the sustainability of dedicated venues. This is important for this research as it indicates that pubs may have absorbed some of this displaced activity. Similarly, Ar. Rutusha (2023) demonstrates that untreated premises produce significantly higher noise levels and offer less acoustic control than treated spaces. Although both studies are context-specific, they highlight a broader issue that many pubs are not acoustically equipped for amplified music. This places them at a structural disadvantage and increases the likelihood of noise disturbance and subsequent complaints, which is directly relevant for this study.

Alongside these considerations, research by Forsyth and Cloonan's (2008) has also shown that the music played within pubs directly shapes patron behaviour and noise levels. Their study of Glasgow pubs demonstrated music as an under-recognised factor within the NTE and how different genres or volumes can escalate rather than reduce disorder. These findings are highly relevant to this research, as music choices within premises can influence noise, disturbance and the likelihood of incidents requiring regulatory intervention.

2.5 Noise Legislation and Enforcement Approaches

The legislative framework governing noise from leisure and licensed premises spans several statutory routes, each offering distinct enforcement mechanisms. These tools vary widely in scope, evidential requirements and practical usability, shaping how LAs regulate pub-related noise.

The Noise Act 1996 offers a rapid response mechanism for excessive night-time noise, but its' narrow operational window (11pm–7am) and strict evidential requirements mean it is inconsistently applied. For pub-related noise, this makes it effective only in severe cases rather than ongoing disturbances. In contrast, the EPA 1990 provides strong enforcement powers for LAs through abatement notices (Section 80). However, its reliance on the subjective statutory nuisance threshold and requirement for prolonged evidence gathering can delay action. This can create tension when residents expect faster action on recurring pub-related noise.

The ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 offers an alternative route focusing on the behaviour of individuals, allowing a flexible and preventative enforcement approach. Whilst it is not specifically designed for noise, it is useful where noise is linked to disorder or patron behaviour. Enforcement includes Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) and Notices (CPNs).

The Licensing Act 2003 focuses on preventing public nuisance through licensing controls, and can request a license review where noise problems persist. The Live Music Act 2012 amended these provisions by deregulating small-scale live music and removing the requirement of a license for performances between 8am and 11pm with audiences up to 500. Whilst the Act made it easier for premises to host live music, it did not remove full control, with LAs retaining the power to impose conditions through the review process if required.

Research by Davies et al., (2005) highlights noise from pubs and clubs as a significant source of complaints to LAs. Although the study by is more dated than others, their research identified inconsistent enforcement approaches across LAs. This is particularly relevant to pub noise, where officer discretion and local policy shape outcomes more than statutory guidance. In a similar attempt to clarify how legislation is interpreted, Fiumicelli (2008) sought the views of Environmental Health Practitioners and acoustic consultants on the legal definition of public nuisance. The varied responses demonstrate the ambiguity surrounding the definition of public nuisance, reinforcing the challenge officers face when applying noise controls.

International research by Akwasi et al., (2023) examine noise enforcement in Ghana, indicates that enforcement inconsistency is common across jurisdictions. Additionally, Chalayonnawin (2015) provides insight into Thailand's legal controls on noise from public entertainment. Chalayonnawin's study, in particular, highlights limitations in Thailand's enforcement tools, licensing systems, and noise thresholds, drawing comparisons with regulatory approaches in the UK and Hong Kong. Although previous studies have identified gaps within the UK's own regulatory processes, it can be argued that UK procedures remain comparatively more developed on a global scale. Beach et al., (2021) similarly note that high noise exposure levels are common internationally, but enforcement remains inconsistent and often constrained by LA capacity. Whilst Beach et al.'s study is not directly relevant as it focuses on the health risks of noise exposure for patrons, it does provide an insight into LA limitations which is a consideration for this study.

Hadfield, Lister and Traynor's (2009) study examined new and revised statutory powers affecting the NTE in England and Wales between 1998 and 2008. Although the timeframe of their analysis extends beyond the scope of this research, the study raises several important points regarding statutory powers and the impact of the Licensing Act 2003 on the NTE. It notes the rapid expansion of regulatory powers, which remains relevant to the present-day research as government announcements indicate forthcoming regulatory and licensing reforms (HM Treasury, 2025). This endeavours to provide additional support for business development and protect long-established venues from noise-related complaints, as outlined by the Department for Business and Trade (2025). These anticipated changes are likely to influence how LAs regulate pubs and manage noise issues. They raise important considerations about the future direction of enforcement practice and highlights the need to understand how officers interpret and apply overlapping statutory powers in practice, which is central to this research.

2.6 Summary of Gaps and Challenges

The literature identifies several gaps in understanding how noise from pubs is perceived and regulated. While studies examine noise measurements, public perceptions and statutory frameworks, there is limited evidence on how LAs apply these powers in practice. A recurring challenge is the inconsistency of enforcement, with multiple legislative routes creating variation between LAs however, few studies explore how these differences emerge regionally. Although some research considers noise trends before, during and after COVID-19, there is limited analysis of how LA enforcement adapted to changing economic activity and noise levels. Existing studies involving officers tend to focus on legislative interpretation rather than their experiences of managing pub-related noise. Much of the evidence is also drawn from long-term quantitative or international research, with limited work centred on UK LAs and even less on specific regions such as the WM. This study addresses these gaps by examining changes in noise-enforcement practices across WM LAs between the pre-COVID (2018–2019) and post-COVID (2022–2023) periods, combining officer perspectives with complaint and enforcement data to provide insight into the practical realities of regulating pub noise in the post-COVID landscape.

3. Methodology and Ethics

3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Approach

This research was classified as a social scientific study, using a mixed-method approach. It employed both statistical and interpretive methods to understand the pre- and post-COVID-19 changes and officers' professional outlook of noise complaints, enforcement actions, and the use of statutory powers relating to pub noise. Supported by Migiro and Magangi (2011), this approach enabled the researcher to address a research problem "more completely", integrating the complementary strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods. Migiro and Magangi highlighted that relying on a single method risked overlooking important dimensions, whereas combining methods allowed for a more comprehensive and detailed understanding, which reinforced the suitability of a mixed-methods design for this study.

Pragmatism underpinned the mixed-methods design, reflecting the view that methodological choices should be guided by what best addressed the research problem. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) described pragmatism as a practical "middle position" that moved beyond the qualitative-quantitative divide and supported the use of multiple forms of data to generate context-relevant findings. This aligned with the aims of the study, in which quantitative FOI data established factual patterns in noise complaints and enforcement actions, while qualitative questionnaire responses and interviews explained how officers interpreted these developments. Pragmatism therefore provided a rational justification for integrating these complementary forms of evidence within a single study.

3.2 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used for the FOI and questionnaire stages, as the study required access to LA officers directly relevant to the research question rather than a statistically representative sample. This aligns with Creswell's (2009) and Denscombe's (2010) guidance that purposive sampling is appropriate when participants are selected for their relevance to the topic. The study therefore focused on 30 LAs within the WMs, which provided a manageable sample while still capturing variation across a defined regional context. The same purposive approach was applied to the interview stage with the addition of voluntary self-selection, so questionnaire respondents could provide contact details. Participants were chosen for their information-rich contributions (Patton, 2002), and interviews were conducted

until thematic saturation was reached. This ensured that the data added depth and contextualised findings following the FOI and questionnaire stages.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

FOI requests were used to obtain quantitative data on pub-related noise complaints for specific pre- and post-COVID-19 periods. They provided a consistent method for accessing information not routinely published by LAs, a recognised strength of FOI-based research (Savage and Hyde, 2014). The statutory 20-day response period also suited the study's time-scale, enabling the collection of standardised datasets. Clifton-Sprigg et al. (2020) similarly highlight the value of FOIs in social-science research for gathering structured information from public bodies. Requests were submitted to WM LAs via online forms or FOI email addresses, seeking 2018–19 and 2022–23 data on pub-related noise complaints and enforcement actions (Appendix C). Responses were logged to track deadlines, assess data quality and issue reminders after the 20-day period.

3.3.2 Questionnaire

A mixed-format questionnaire was used, combining closed and open questions to gather both descriptive data and contextual insights on officers' experiences of pub-related noise and enforcement practices (Appendix D). Closed questions provided comparable quantitative responses, while open questions allowed participants to elaborate, which reflected Reja et al.'s (2003) argument that mixed formats balance standardisation with flexibility. The questionnaire was piloted prior to distribution, leading to minor wording adjustments and confirmed construct validity to ensure items reflected the intended concepts. The pilot also verified that the distribution and retrieval processes functioned effectively. The final questionnaire was distributed to LAs by email with the participation sheet and survey link (Appendix E and F). It remained open for four-weeks, with responses monitored at the mid-point and reminder emails issued to encourage participation.

3.3.3 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore officers' views in greater depth following the questionnaire. This format provided a balance of structure and flexibility, allowing questions to be adapted and enabling probing where clarification was needed (Kelly, 2010, cited in Kallio et al., 2016; Barriball and While, 1994). The interviews followed Rubin and Rubin's (2011) responsive interviewing approach, which recognises that participants hold their own interpretations of events and supports flexible follow-up to explore these perspectives. Each interview lasted approximately 30-minutes and was conducted via Microsoft Teams. Consent to audio-recording was obtained in advance to support accurate transcription and analysis. Four officers provided contact details and three interviews were completed due to one non-response. Saturation was reached after the third interview.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistical procedures to summarise and compare pre- and post-COVID patterns in the FOI and questionnaire datasets (Cooksey, 2020). Bar and pie charts, percentages and measures of central tendency were used to present the main features of the data. FOI data was examined to assess variations in noise complaints and enforcement actions, while closed-question responses captured officers perceived changes in practice. These techniques enabled complex datasets to be condensed into interpretable patterns, making them appropriate for summarising both FOI counts and questionnaire responses (Kaur et al., 2018). Graphical displays were used alongside numerical summaries to support accurate interpretation, reinforcing that descriptive statistics alone was insufficient and that combining graphical and numerical methods strengthened the rigour of the analysis.

3.4.2 Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process as outlined in Figure 4.3.1. This approach, further supported by Terry et al., (2017), is flexible and interpretative, making it appropriate for exploring officers perceived pre- and post-COVID-19 changes in noise issues, enforcement processes and statutory powers.

Data was firstly analysed separately, with open-ended questionnaire responses providing initial insights into officers' experiences. The analysis of the interviews then added depth and challenged these findings. Coding was conducted systematically across both datasets, and themes were developed to capture patterns relevant to the study. The datasets were then integrated by identifying shared themes, allowing key insights to be brought together across the qualitative material.

3.5 Triangulation

Triangulation was used to strengthen the validity of the analysis by drawing on multiple sources of evidence. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data provided an evidence-based understanding of changes in pub-related noise issues. This aligns with Hussein's (2009) view that combining methods enhances credibility by allowing the strengths of one approach to offset the limitations of another. This study also followed Rossman and Wilson's (1984) framework, which demonstrates how quantitative and qualitative methods can be integrated through corroboration, elaboration and initiation. FOI data offered a factual baseline for identifying pre- and post-COVID-19 patterns, while questionnaire responses and interviews corroborated, elaborated and, at times, challenged these trends. In line with Rossman and Wilson's pragmatic stance, triangulation in this study did not privilege one method but integrated each form of evidence to produce a more comprehensive account of changing pub-related noise.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the university's ethics committee prior to the data collection phase (Appendix G). Participants received an information sheet during distribution of the questionnaire and those that consented were provided access to the questionnaire. During follow-up interviews, the data protection procedures were reiterated to participants prior to commencement.

3.7 Limitations

The methodological design of this study introduced several limitations. The use of purposive sampling within a single region (the WM) restricted the diversity of the sample, which may have affected response rates and limited the external validity and transferability of the findings. Reliance on voluntary self-selection also meant that the dataset may reflect the views

of officers with stronger opinions, introducing potential self-report bias. The questionnaire presented further reliability challenges, as officers may have interpreted questions differently, and the pre-COVID-19 focus created scope for recall bias. The study's specific focus on pubs also narrowed the scope, and inconsistencies in how LAs defined "a pub" added an additional layer of subjectivity to the quantitative dataset.

The qualitative components carried interpretive limitations, particularly given the researcher's professional role within a LA Environmental Protection department. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) notes, qualitative inquiry is shaped by the researcher's perspective and complete detachment is neither possible nor desirable. Braun and Clarke (2020) similarly emphasise that themes do not simply "emerge", rather the researcher actively identifies and interprets them, highlighting the centrality of subjectivity in reflexive thematic analysis. Analytic decisions were revisited throughout to ensure the process remained consistent and that interpretations were grounded in the data. Despite these constraints, the study maintained a clear and transparent methodological process.

3.8 Reflexivity

The researcher's dual position as a student and a professional within a LA Environmental Protection department offered practical insight into LA practice. It assisted in understanding the operational context and reflected the researcher's general interest in the topic, without determining expectations about the study's outcomes. This insider perspective supported the development of the research enhanced interpretation of the findings through practice-based knowledge (Greene, 2014). At the same time, the researcher recognised the potential for bias associated with insider research with their position having an influence (Finlay, 2002). To mitigate this, data was collected from a wide sample of WM LAs to ensure perspectives extended beyond the researcher's own organisation. Reflexivity was maintained through regular revisiting of analytic decisions, which enabled the researcher to monitor how their professional background might influence interpretation and to uphold transparency and rigour (Ortlipp, 2008).

4. Results

4.1 FOI Responses

The FOI response rate was high, providing a broad sample across WM LAs (Table 4.1.1). However, this was not 100% despite the legal requirement to return requested information. Additionally, responses were not complete, with several authorities unable to provide full pre-COVID-19 data. This resulted in a smaller dataset for the pre-COVID-19 period compared with post-COVID-19. The full set of FOI results can be found in Appendix H.

Table 4.1.1. Response Rate for FOI Request.

No. of FOI Requests	Responses Received	Response Rate
30	28	93%

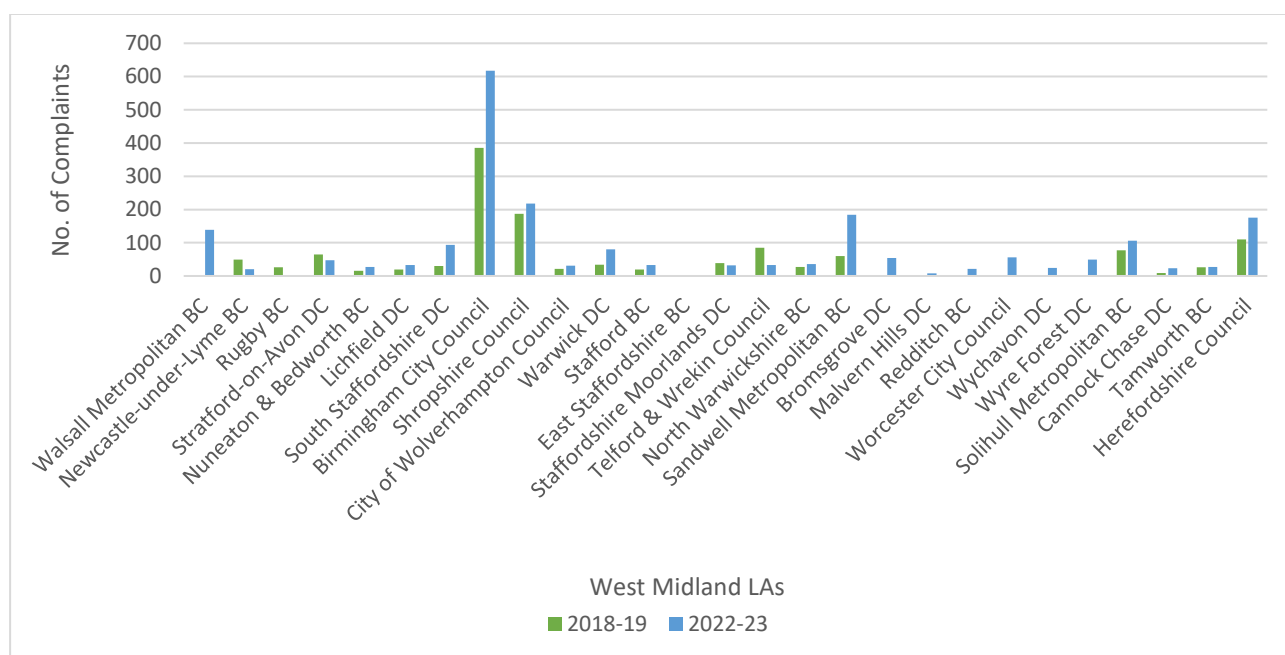


Figure 4.1.1. Pub Noise Complaints Pre- and Post-COVID-19

Across the authorities that provided complete datasets (n=18), 13 reported a higher number of noise complaints in the post-COVID-19 period compared with pre-COVID-19. Five authorities reported either similar levels or a decrease (Figure 4.1.1).

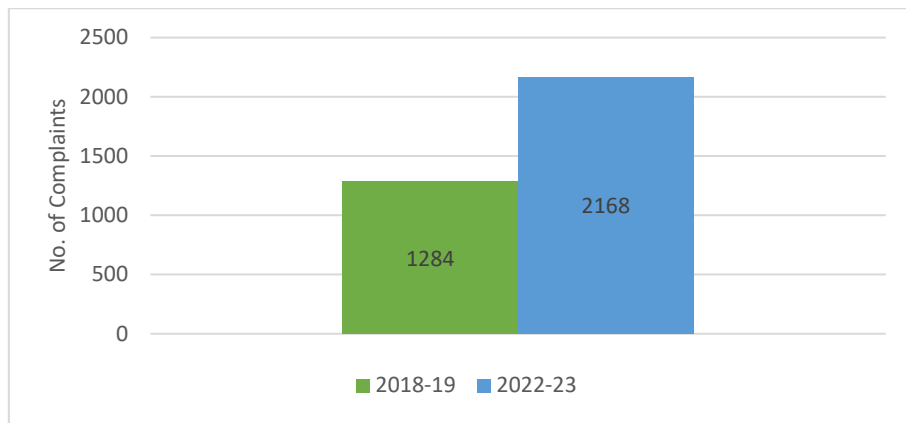


Figure 4.1.2. Total of Pub Noise Complaints from WM LAs.

When accumulated across all responding authorities, total noise complaints increased from 1,284 pre-COVID-19 to 2,168 post-COVID-19, representing a 69% increase (Figure 4.1.2).

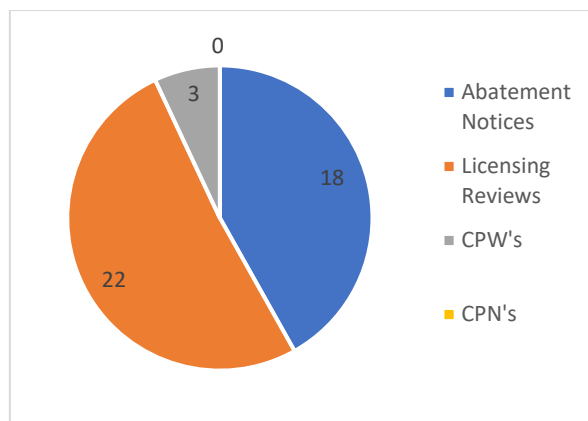


Figure 4.1.3. Pre-COVID-19 (2018-19) Enforcement Action Totals from WM LAs

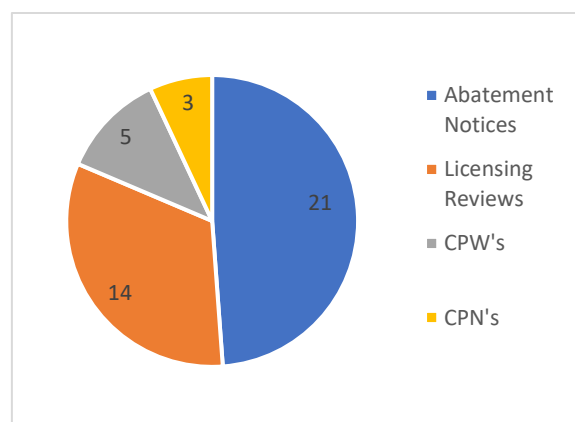


Figure 4.1.4. Post-COVID-19 (2022-23) Enforcement Action Totals from WM LAs

The total number of enforcement actions remained the same across both periods (n=43) but showed a shift in the types of actions taken before and after COVID-19 (Figures 4.1.3 and 4.1.4). Pre-COVID-19, licensing reviews were the most common intervention (n=22), followed by abatement notices (n=18). Post-COVID-19, abatement notices became the most frequent (n=21), while licensing reviews decreased to 14. Additional post-COVID-19 actions included 5 CPWs and 3 CPNs.

4.2 Questionnaire Findings

A total of 15 questionnaire responses were received from officers across 12 WM LAs. Respondents included 10 Environmental Health Officers, 1 Licensing Officer, and 4 officers from other regulatory roles. The questionnaire was open for 32 days, and full results are provided in Appendix I.

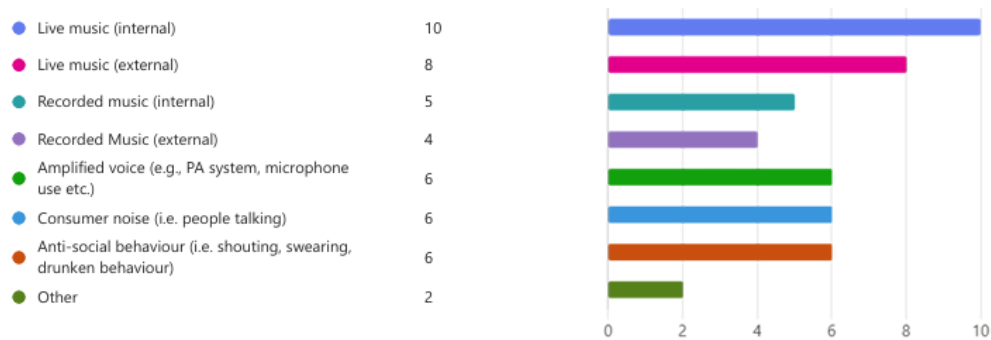


Figure 4.2.1. Questionnaire Response (Q7): What was the most frequent type of pub-noise complaint pre-COVID-19 (2018-19).

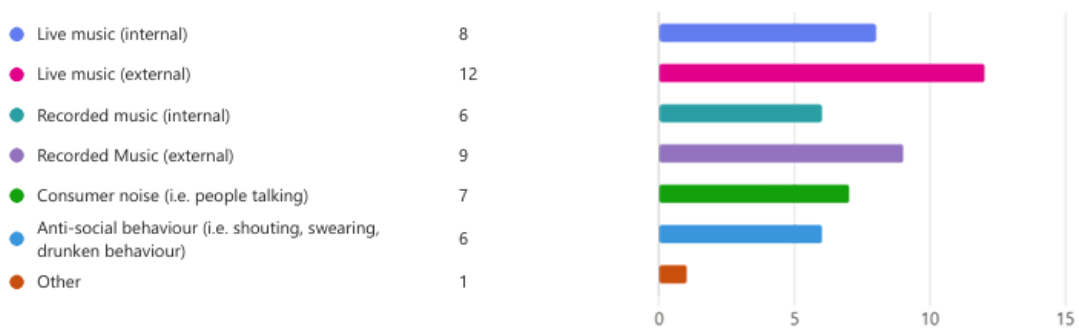


Figure 4.2.2. Questionnaire Response (Q13): What was the most frequent type of pub-noise complaint post-COVID-19 (2022-23).

Figures 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 show the most frequent types of pub-related noise complaints reported by officers pre-COVID-19 (2018–19) and post-COVID-19 (2022–23). Pre-COVID-19, internal live music was the most common complaint (n=10), with external live music also frequently reported (n=8). Post-COVID-19, external sources became more prominent, with external live music increasing to n=12 and external recorded music rising from n=4 to n=9. Internal live music remained consistent (n=8). Across both periods, live music remained the most reported source of pub-related noise.

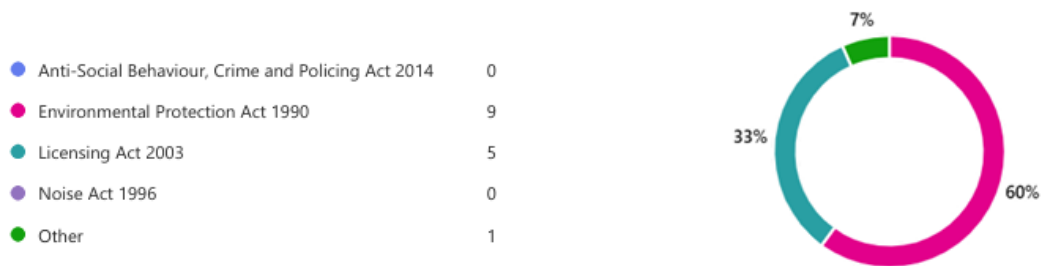


Figure 4.2.3. Questionnaire Response (Q20): Which legislation is most commonly used to address pub-related noise issues in your LA.

The EPA 1990 was reported by LA officers as the legislation most commonly used to address pub-related noise issues (n=9) (Figure 4.2.3). The Licensing Act 2003 was used less frequently (n=5), and no respondents reported using the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 or the Noise Act 1996. One respondent selected ‘other,’ referring to the Live Music Act 2012.

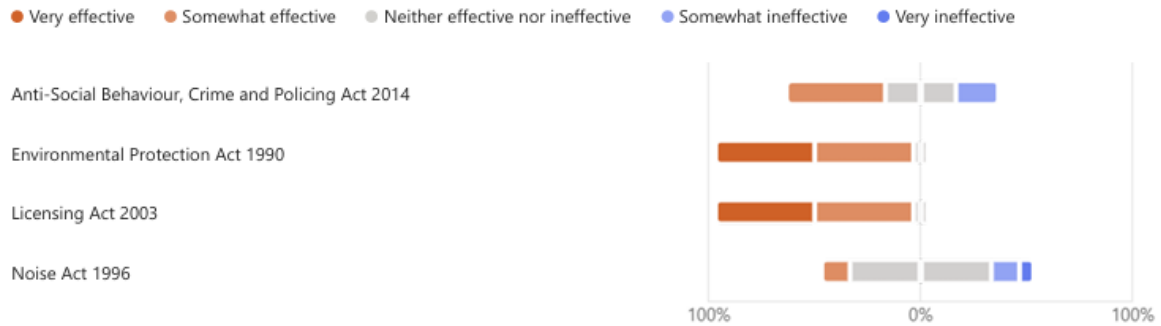


Figure 4.2.4. Questionnaire Response (Q21): How effective do you consider the following legislation on addressing pub-related noise issues.

Figure 4.2.4 shows officers' views on the effectiveness of legislation used to address pub-related noise issues, with the EPA 1990 and the Licensing Act 2003 generally rated as the most effective. In contrast, the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and the Noise Act 1996 received more mixed ratings, with responses concentrated around the mid-range and less frequently rated as effective.

4.3 Interview Findings

Following the questionnaire, 7 LA officers provided their details for follow-up interviews. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with officers from WM authorities. Themes were developed from coded data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, with illustrative quotes included to support key points (Figure 4.3.1). The interviews offered insight into officers' perceptions of pub-related noise pre-and post-COVID-19 and their views on the effectiveness of legislation when investigating complaints. Participants are referred to as P1–P3 to maintain anonymity and all interview transcriptions can be found in Appendix J.

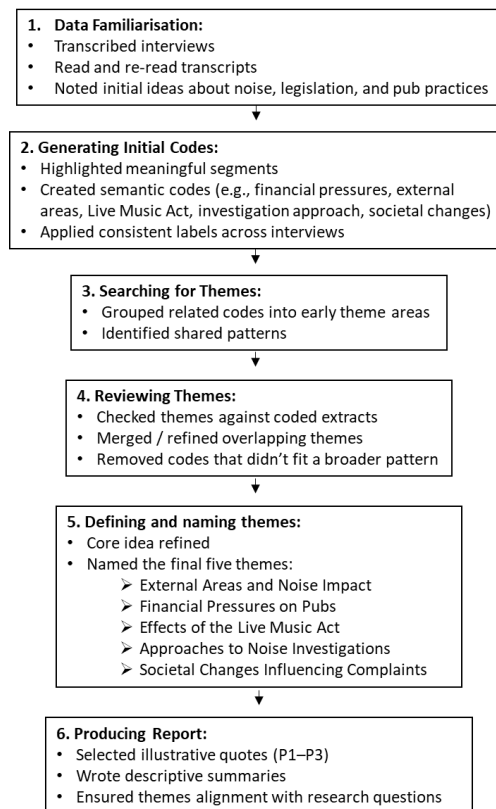


Figure 4.3.1. Adapted Coding and Theme Development Process (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

4.3.1 Theme 1: External Areas and Noise Impact

During interviews, officers noted that COVID-19 had increased the use of the external areas for pubs. The common view was that people became accustomed to using outdoor spaces due to distancing restrictions, therefore pubs accommodated by implementing structures such as marquees and tents. This was commonly linked by the officers to the implementation of the smoking ban pre-COVID-19.

P1: *“One thing about COVID, it moved people outside to reduce the risk of them contacting the virus and that habit of being outside has to some extent continued.”*

P2: *“...generated again by COVID because of the need for extra space and distancing in marquee type things. So, you see a lot of pubs now have a tent type of structure... where people aren't smoking in it... originally it was to give more spacing for COVID, but now it's seen as an extra venue and you get things like maybe parties or wedding.”*

4.3.2 Theme 2: Financial Pressures on Pubs

A common view among participants was that COVID-19 had contributed to increased financial pressures on pubs. Participants described pubs adapting their approach in order to draw in customers.

P1: *"Hospitality is struggling. They're trying to do everything to get people in."*

P2: *"...longer-term consequence is that a lot of pubs have started to do more music in order to bring people in, because of the financial pressures which are related to the smoking ban, to COVID... you're almost looking at either pubs turn themselves into a restaurant, or they turn themselves into a music venue."*

P3: *"...these businesses and places... some of them folded, well, a lot of them did, a lot of them closed. People were losing jobs; people were losing their businesses."*

4.3.3 Theme 3: Effects of the Live Music Act

When discussing legislation, all participants highlighted the Live Music Act 2012, noting that it has a clear impact on how they regulate pubs and manage music levels.

P1: *"...biggest issue for me has been the Live Music Act really. Because whereas people in the past had to apply for TEN, now they don't. I think that's been the biggest negative around trying to control noise and protect the public."*

P2: *"...originally it was live music was supposed to be like real people playing instruments, but it became recorded music as well... Because these days it's very difficult to differentiate between live and recorded music...It removed that element of control."*

4.3.4 Theme 4: Approaches to Noise Investigations

Participants also differed in how they used their regulatory powers during investigations and enforcement. Some described the Licensing Act as their most effective tool, while others preferred the EPA 1990. These differences reflected variation in how officers approached investigations, managed complainant expectations, and enforced standards with pubs.

P1: *"...it was 18-months to get a court date up here, so an abatement notice isn't really the best. A licence review is quicker and a bit less formal..."*

P2: *"...if you live next door to a pub, you've got to expect a certain amount of disruption. It's inevitable."*

P3: *"...there was definitely a different approach ...Before COVID, it was more clear cut... Whereas ...coming out of COVID, we had to find to be more flexible."*

4.3.5 Theme 5: Societal Changes Influencing Complaints

Participants also described wider societal changes that were influencing noise complaints, with COVID-19 noted as a contributing factor. Changes in how people spend their leisure time, reduced nightclub attendance, and the influence of social media were all identified as shaping how and why individuals complain about noise.

P1: *"...the way in which the customers want to have a good time has changed. Partly because of COVID and I think it's just society, really. There are fewer people going inside the pub to play darts and dominoes. More people wanted to be outside listening to music..."*

P1: *"...back in the day, pubs are shut at 11. You have to go to a nightclub after that. But certainly in [redacted], the city, the town centre pubs have until three, maybe four even."*

P3: *"...part of it is to do with the internet... if somebody's got a problem with a pub and the first thing that a lot of people do is they post it on Facebook and then these other people join in."*

P3: *"...it's respect for each other's rights, being neighbourly. I think possibly a lot of us have seen that there's a less neighbourliness... I think it was happening anyway, and I think what Covid did was speed it up."*

5. Discussion

Findings from this study examined the changes in pub-related noise and enforcement across the two periods and explored how officers understood these shifts.

5.1 FOI

FOI data indicates a clear overall rise in pub-related noise complaints post-COVID-19, with Figure 4.1.2 demonstrating a 69% increase. This majority increase suggests broader shifts in public behaviour following COVID-19. Variation between LA results highlights surrounding influences such as population density, geographical size, and the distribution of licensed premises. Whilst this contradicts Shaw and McCullough's (2023) findings for noise complaint data, their single-authority study is reflective of how local contextual factors can influence complaint patterns and create contrasting results. Tong and Kang's (2021) study in the role of urban density in shaping noise exposure is particularly relevant here, with higher complaint volumes in larger authorities such as Birmingham, aligning with their observations (Figure 4.1.1). Therefore, implying that complaint patterns are shaped not just by pub activity but by the demographic, spatial, and environmental characteristics of each area.

Data from Figures 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 indicate that there was no overall increase in enforcement action taken by WM LAs between the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods. However, the data suggests a shift in the type of enforcement used in relation to pub-related noise. The post-COVID-19 period shows a greater reliance on statutory powers such as abatement notices and increased use of CPWs and CPNs. This pattern reflects a shift towards more efficient procedures and faster interventions, with a focus on premises' management and behaviour for noise controls. This aligns with wider observations by Baldwin and Black (2016), who highlight that regulatory decisions are often guided by proportionate and practicable responses. Whilst the use of CPWs and CPNs has increased post-COVID-19, data indicates that the licensing review remains consistently applied but the abatement notice is the favoured enforcement approach.

5.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire offered an initial insight into officers' perceptions of pub-related noise. Overall, officers perceived an increase in complaints following COVID-19, with live and

recorded music in external areas reported as the most common noise sources (Figure 4.2.2.) Live music remained the most frequently cited source for both the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods. Its continued prominence suggests that despite shifts in operating practices, music-related disturbance remains a structurally embedded feature of pub-related noise. Responses also mentioned the increase of consumer noise, including patrons leaving, congregating, or shouting, indicating shifts in patron behaviour. This aligns with Hadfield, Lister and Traynor's (2009) observation that behavioural noise, such as vocal noise and crowd movement, often contributes as much to local disturbance as amplified music.

Results also identified the EPA 1990 as the legislation most commonly used to address pub-related noise issues by officers. ASB powers and the Noise Act 1996 reported as being used less frequently and perceived as less effective for pub-related noise. This aligns with the established role of EPA 1990 as the primary statutory route for addressing environmental noise. Its prominence suggests that officers continue to rely on established frameworks that offer a more predictable enforcement pathway than newer ASB powers.

5.3 Interviews

Interviews with three LA officers followed the questionnaire, to expand the qualitative dataset. Officers generally perceived an increase in noise-related complaints post-COVID-19, and five themes were identified from the analysis to provide insight into the contributing factors.

5.3.1 External Areas and Noise Impact

A consistent theme across interviews was the increased use of external areas by pubs, which officers linked directly to behavioural changes established post-COVID-19. As one officer explained, "*...during COVID, people got used to going outside... even then when the restrictions started lessening, people still wanted to stay outside*" (P3). This shift towards outdoor socialising did not disappear once restrictions eased but instead became embedded in pub-culture and customer expectations. Officers also highlighted the role of sporting events during the reopening period, which encouraged pubs to relocate entertainment outdoors. One officer recalled that "*...the World Cup or the Euros... as we were coming out of Covid, I had loads... of complaints about pubs having outdoor screens...*" (P3). These accounts support Cueto et al.,

(2023) study in identifying an increase in the use of outdoor leisure spaces following COVID-19.

Participants further noted that many pubs invested in semi-permanent structures which have been repurposed for event spaces. One officer described, *“...you see a lot of pubs now have a tent type of structure... originally it was to give more spacing for COVID, but now it's seen as an extra venue and you get things like maybe parties or weddings”* (P2). These structures effectively extend the outdoor season, allowing pubs to host entertainment and private functions for longer. Taken together, these findings suggest that the increased use of external areas represents a lasting shift in how pubs operate rather than a short-term response to COVID-19 restrictions. This expansion of outdoor activity increases the risk of noise escaping into surrounding areas, contributing to the rise in complaints perceived by officers.

5.3.2 Financial Pressures on Pubs

During interviews, officers highlighted the financial pressures facing pubs, driving many premises to diversify their activities in order to attract customers. One officer noted, *“...hospitality is struggling. They're trying to do everything to get people in”* (P1). Officers emphasised that diversification has included family-oriented events, daytime discos, and extended evening entertainment, resulting in noise occurring earlier in the day and continuing later into the night. As part of these efforts to generate additional income, officers observed that many pubs now rely more heavily on external spaces to host events. Officers expressed concern that these structures are not acoustically suited to amplified music or large gatherings, a point supported by Ar. Rutusha (2023), who found that untreated or temporary spaces provide significantly less acoustic control than purpose-built indoor environments.

Contrary to expectations, officers emphasised that the financial pressures shaping pub behaviour is not a direct result of COVID-19. As one participant explained, *“a lot of pubs have started to do more music in order to bring people in, because of the financial pressures which are related to the smoking ban, to COVID, to the financial situation, all those things which are causing pubs to close down”* (P2). This reflects wider research by Samuelson (2018), identifying long-term economic, social, and legislative pressures contributing to the decline of traditional British pubs. As a result, closures can concentrate customers into fewer venues, increasing

footfall and potentially intensifying noise impacts. Diversification therefore becomes a necessary survival strategy, but one that may inadvertently contribute to increased noise complaints.

5.3.3 Effects of the Live Music Act 2012

Before the Live Music Act came into force in 2012, LAs were able to impose preventative noise-control conditions. The Act deregulated many small-scale performances to stimulate the live music sector, but officers felt this “...removed that element of control” (P2) and “...weakened the protections that people have” (P1). Their concerns align with Morris (2013), who argues that the Act significantly reduced LA oversight, shifting power towards venues and creating enforcement gaps, particularly in mixed-use areas. The removal of licensing conditions limits LAs preventative tools, shifting enforcement towards reactive approaches and increasing noise risks.

5.3.4 Approaches to Noise Investigation

Interviews indicated that while officers remain duty-bound to investigate noise complaints, their approach notably shifted post-COVID-19. One officer described how previously “...if you've got a noise problem, you go around and you tell somebody off... if they didn't, they get a noise abatement notice,” but “coming out of COVID, we had to be more flexible” (P3). Officers became more conscious of the financial pressures on pubs, which influenced how they balanced enforcement with proportionality. Officers described prioritising informal resolution, with one explaining that “...we try and work with the business and work with the people to bring about a solution, then only go really formal if all of the avenues have failed” (P1). Therefore, suggesting a shift towards earlier engagement and stronger rapport-building with businesses as the preferred initial strategy.

COVID-19 also changed how officers responded to resident complaints with many becoming accustomed to quieter environments during lockdowns. Officers therefore had to manage expectations, emphasising that *“...if you live next door to a pub, you've got to expect a certain amount of disruption”* (P2). This aligns with research showing external noise levels dropped during COVID-19 (Alías and Alsina-Pagès, 2022; Michaud et al., 2022), supporting the notion that noise post-COVID-19 may feel more intrusive to residents. These dynamics illustrate how officers were required to balance heightened resident sensitivity with realistic enforcement boundaries.

Resource limitations were a recurring concern during interviews. One officer noted that their authority had an Out-of-Hours monitoring service, which was beneficial for monitoring and obtaining evidence. However, this resource is not available across all LAs and carrying out frequent in-person noise assessments impose strain on staff and budgets: *“...there just isn't the resource in local councils to do that, apart from maybe one or two pubs... how many weekends can one obviously give up?”* (P1). These differences show that the practical ability to enforce noise controls depends as much on local capacity as on the legislation itself.

5.3.5 Societal Changes Influencing Complaints

Officers described wider societal changes reshaping noise-complaint patterns, many of which pre-dated but were intensified by COVID-19. One recurring theme was a shift in how people socialise. One officer noted that *“there are fewer people going inside the pub to play darts and dominoes. More people wanted to be outside listening to music, DJ”* and *“fewer people seem to go to night clubs ... they're not that busy”* (P1). These reflections suggest a shift in leisure habits away from traditional indoor pub culture and late-night venues. Nicholls and Conroy's (2021) qualitative study supports this interpretation, portraying the closure of licensed premises during lockdown normalised home-based drinking and encouraged individuals to reassess their social routines. Officers also pointed to changes in opening hours, with one officer reflecting that *“the town centre pubs have until three, maybe four even”* (P1), indicating that extended opening hours have reshaped the timing and distribution of noise.

Furthermore, officers perceived a decline in residents' tolerance for noise associated with normal activities. One officer noted that pre-COVID-19, complaints focused mainly on music but: *"...afterwards, people would be complaining about the music, the noise from the bin collections...people being outside"* (P3). As a result, the officer concluded that *"there's a less neighbourliness...it was happening anyway, and I think what Covid did was speed it up."* (P3), suggesting that whilst it is not a direct consequence of COVID-19, weakened social cohesion has made residents less willing to accommodate everyday noise. This aligns with Lee and Jeong's (2021) findings that neighbour-noise annoyance increased sharply during lockdown, remaining elevated afterwards and indicating a lasting shift in expectations of quiet. Broader cultural trends may also underpin this reduced noise acceptance. Hosokawa's (1984) work regarding personal listening devices suggests that people increasingly curate their own soundscapes, creating an expectation of control over what they hear. This can make unwanted environmental noise feel more intrusive, echoing officers' observations of reduced tolerance for routine sounds. Yildirim and Aref (2021) report similar patterns, noting not only heightened sensitivity but also changes in the types of noise residents identify as problematic.

Officers also highlighted the growing role of social media in shaping complaint behaviour. One officer explained, *"if somebody's got a problem with a pub... the first thing that a lot of people do is they post it on Facebook and then these other people join in"* (P3). This dynamic reflects a broader shift in how grievances are expressed and amplified. The Twitter analysis by Lee and Jeong (2021) supports this, illustrating how online platforms increased the visibility of noise issues during COVID-19 and contributed to complaint patterns that have continued beyond COVID-19. In this sense, social media not only reflects changing attitudes but actively contributes to the construction of noise as a community problem.

5.4 Triangulation

Triangulating the FOI data, questionnaire responses and interview accounts has added depth and clarity to understanding patterns and enforcement procedures relating to pub-related noise across the WM. FOI data showed no overall rise in formal enforcement and the closed-question responses similarly indicated that the number of formal enforcement actions remained stable. The qualitative accounts explain this pattern, with officers linking rising complaints to extended outdoor use. The increase in noise complaints therefore illustrates

how demand pressures have grown without translating into increased enforcement activity. This suggests that officers were generally able to manage issues informally and raises questions about the credibility of some complaints, as well as the potential influence of resource constraints on enforcement decisions.

There were also areas of variation between datasets and within officer accounts, highlighting inconsistencies in LA procedures and enforcement. FOI data showed increases in pub-related noise complaints in some, but not all LAs. Interviews offered several explanations for this variation, including differences in how legislation is applied and investigated. An officer described licence reviews as *“quicker and a bit less formal... but you still need evidence to put a case forwards”* (P1). Views on statutory nuisance varied: one officer highlighted delays: *“it was 18-months to get a court”* (P1), another stressed its clarity, noting that once a nuisance is identified, *“local authorities are duty bound to serve a noise abatement notice... it’s clear cut really”* (P3). As statutory nuisance and ASB powers rely heavily on officer discretion, their uneven application may contribute to the variation observed in the FOI data, aligning with Beach et al.’s (2021) findings on inconsistent enforcement across LAs.

5.5 Implications

The findings help explain post-COVID-19 pub-related noise complaint patterns and the regulatory behaviours. Rising complaints, uneven enforcement and the influence of officer discretion have practical implications for both pubs and LAs. For pubs, increasing complaints and a return to pre-COVID-19 expectations may lead to closer scrutiny and reduced flexibility. For LAs, rising demands combined with limited budgets suggests continued strain on capacity and inconsistency in how powers are applied. These pressures mirror concerns raised in the 2025 call for evidence on licensing reform (Home Office and Department for Business and Trade, 2025), where stakeholders highlighted noise, public nuisance, ASB, under-resourcing and the need for clearer guidance. The alignment between this study and the national consultation responses indicates that future licensing policy will shape how pub-related noise is managed. Without additional resources or clearer national direction, these increasing regulatory pressures are likely to intensify.

5.6 Limitations

Whilst this study generated valuable insights, there were limitations linked to the scope of an undergraduate project. Time constraints reduced the period available for data collection, limiting opportunities to follow up with LAs. This also meant the study could not explore changes over a longer period or examine seasonal variations in complaint patterns. Access challenges further restricted participation as many environmental health departments do not provide direct contact emails, meaning communication relied on online forms or general inboxes, which were not always effective. Officer workloads and service pressures may also have affected response rates, as Environmental Protection departments often operate with limited capacity. As a result, questionnaire responses were lower than anticipated, which restricts the extent to which the findings can be applied beyond the region studied. A larger-scale study may have strengthened the analysis, but this was beyond the remit of the project.

6. Recommendations

Further to the findings from this study, the following recommendations are proposed for LAs and policymakers.

6.1 Trends Across Licensed Premises

Future studies should extend their focus to a wider range of licensed premises. This study highlighted the growing diversification of pubs post-COVID-19, with increasing emphasis on music and private or public events. It is likely that similar premises are following these trends, therefore broadening the scope would demonstrate the implications this has for noise management across different premises.

6.2 Business Perspectives in Noise Research

Together, this study and existing research contribute to understanding post-COVID-19 noise issues. However, business perspectives remain largely absent from current research, despite their key role. Future research would therefore benefit from incorporating the views of businesses to better understand how noise is perceived and managed in practice. Additionally, bringing together business and resident perceptions with measured noise levels would offer a clearer understanding of how noise is experienced and interpreted across different groups. Comparing perceived and actual noise levels would strengthen the evidence by reducing reliance on subjective accounts alone and providing a more robust assessment of noise impacts.

6.3 Broader Geographic Scope

A wider, national-level study would enable more comprehensive data collection and allow for comparison across different LA contexts. This would identify consistent challenges and highlight areas where national guidance or policy intervention may be beneficial. It would also provide a clearer understanding of whether the issues observed in this study reflect broader post-COVID-19 trends or are specific to particular localities.

6.4 The Role of Planning in Noise Management

Interviews and previous literature offered a limited insight into how planning processes influence noise management. This may become increasingly significant as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2024) encourages the redevelopment of brownfield land (Section 11), leading to greater residential development within towns and cities within close proximity to established licensed premises. Future research should examine how planning authorities apply tools such as the Agent of Change principle (paragraph 200 of the NPPF) along with the impact in the long-term coexistence between licensed premises and residents.

6.5 Promote Community Engagement

Interview evidence highlighted a decline in neighbour tolerance and weakening community cohesion. While many LAs undertake community-engagement work, there is potential to strengthen this by formally embedding engagement into noise-management procedures. Providing clearer guidance on noise processes and facilitating dialogue between residents and venues could help reduce conflict and support more collaborative approaches to resolving noise issues.

6.6 Strengthen Officer Training

Findings revealed inconsistencies in how noise complaints are assessed and managed across LAs. Officers emphasised the importance of practical, scenario-based training, particularly for those new to the role. One officer noted, *“a lot of officers when you first come in don't necessarily have experience for assessing statutory nuisance”* (P3). Developing more structured training programmes and guidance would promote more consistent practice nationally. It would also place a stronger emphasis on practical learning, supporting less-experienced officers build confidence and make more consistent assessments of noise and enforcement actions decisions.

7. Conclusion

This study highlights how COVID-19 influenced pub-related noise, shaping both complaint patterns and LA regulatory practices.

The findings show an increase in pub-related noise complaints within the WMs region indicating a shift in societal norms, exacerbated by COVID-19, reshaping public tolerance of pub-related noise. Additional financial pressures and diversification of pubs reflects that music-related disturbance remain structurally embedded features of pubs. The increased use of external areas and semi-permanent structures were significant contributing factors post-COVID-19 by facilitating a wider variety of events and extending seasonal operating hours. The combination of heightened resident sensitivity and increased use of acoustically untreated spaces has created a more conflicted community environment.

This study has also contributed to understanding how LA officers address pub-related noise post-COVID-19, highlighting both legislative and regulatory constraints. Despite no overall increase in enforcement action, there was a shift in the types of interventions used. The EPA 1990 remained the dominant legislation for addressing pub-related noise, with officers emphasising its effectiveness. The Licensing Act 2003 continued to play a consistent role, but officers also noted that the Live Music Act 2012 limited their ability to proactively regulate music. Furthermore, data showed an increased use of ASB powers as a quicker alternative, reflecting the limitations of established frameworks and impacts of resource pressures on officers' ability to enforce noise controls. These issues raise broader questions for future regulatory reform and how licensing changes may reshape the balance between businesses, residents and LAs.

The significance of these findings lies in the growing recognition of noise as a public health concern, affecting both physical and psychological wellbeing. This study and wider literature suggest that noise sensitivity has changed in the post-COVID-19 context, influencing how noise impacts are perceived and managed. As residential development continues to expand into areas of commercial activity, the challenge for LAs will be to balance proportionate regulation of licensed premises with evolving residential expectations. Ultimately managing these dynamics will shape future relationships between licensed premises, communities, and regulatory authorities.

8. References

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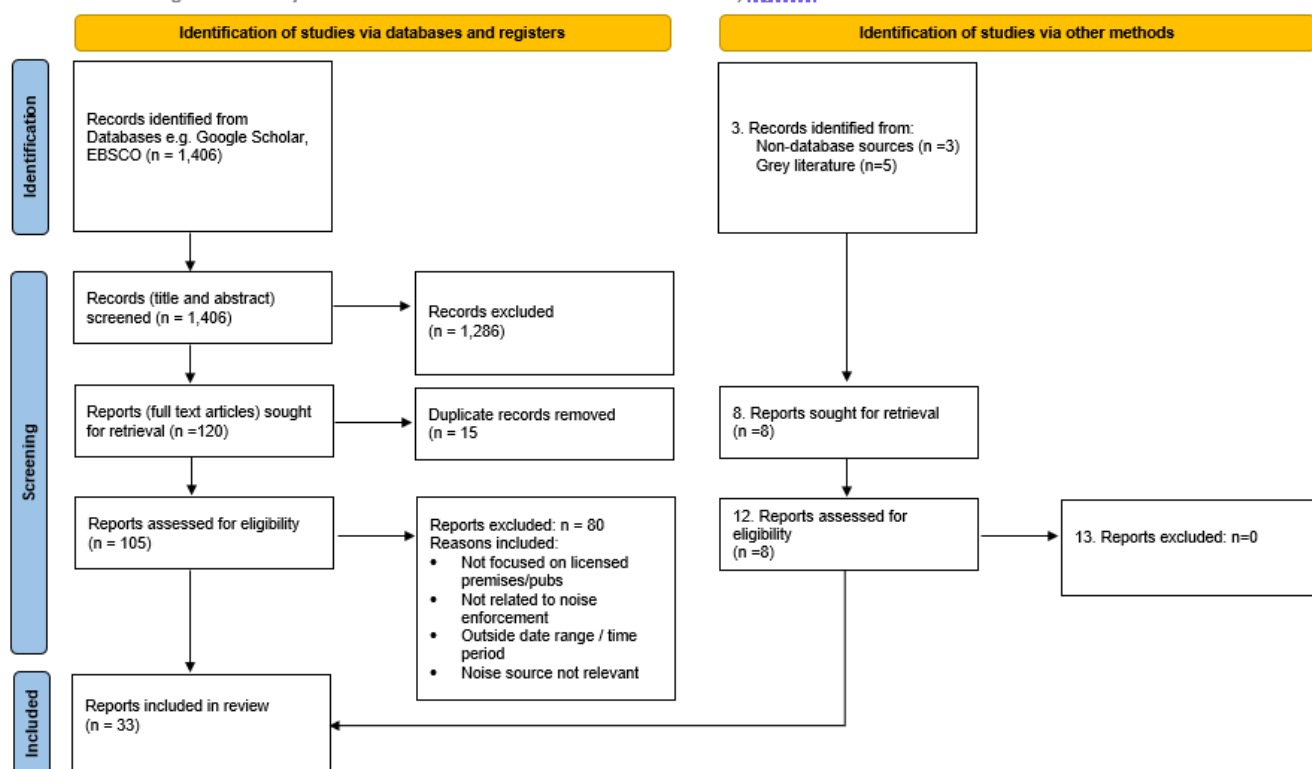
9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: Literature Review Search Terms

Data Base	Search String / Key Words
Google Scholar	("noise enforcement" OR "statutory nuisance" OR "noise complaints") AND ("licensed premises" OR pubs OR "night-time economy") AND ("local authority" OR "environmental health")
	("noise enforcement" OR "noise complaints") AND ("enforcement trends" OR "changes in enforcement" OR "temporal analysis") AND (2018 OR 2019 OR 2022 OR 2023)
	("licensed premises noise" OR "pub noise" AND ("local authority" OR council"))
	("noise complaints" OR "statutory nuisance") AND ("lockdown" OR "pandemic") AND ("licensed premises" OR pubs)
	("Environmental Protection Act 1990") OR ("Licensing Act 2003") AND ("local authority enforcement" AND "noise")
	("noise complaints" OR "noise enforcement") AND ("West Midlands" OR Birmingham OR Coventry OR Wolverhampton OR Dudley OR Walsall OR Sandwell OR Solihull) AND ("licensed premises" OR pubs)
EBSCO	("noise enforcement" OR "statutory nuisance" OR "noise complaints") AND ("licensed premises" OR pubs OR "night-time economy") AND ("local authority" OR "environmental health")
	noise enforcement OR noise complaints AND enforcement trends OR changes in enforcement
	noise complaints OR statutory nuisance AND pandemic AND licensed premises OR pubs
	licensed premises OR pubs AND noise AND local authority
	Environmental Protection Act 1990" OR Licensing Act 2003 AND local authority enforcement AND noise
	noise complaints OR noise enforcement AND west midlands AND licensed premises OR pubs

9.2 Appendix B: Literature Review PRISMA Flow Diagram

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

9.3 Appendix C: FOI Email Request

FOI Request – Noise Complaints & Enforcement on Pubs (2018–2019 & 2022–2023)



Anna Jordan

To:



Reply



Reply all



Forward



Mon 19/01/2026 10:20

Good morning,

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

I am conducting academic research as part of my BSc Environmental Health dissertation at University Centre Weston into how noise enforcement relating to pubs (public houses) has changed between the pre-COVID period and the post-COVID period. I would be grateful if you could provide the following information for your local authority area.

For each of the two periods:

- 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2019
- 1 January 2022 – 31 December 2023

Please provide:

1. The number of noise complaints received where the subject of the complaint was a pub.
2. The number of abatement notices served on pubs under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to noise.
3. The number of licensing reviews initiated in relation to pubs where noise was a contributing factor.
4. The number of Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) and Community Protection Notices (CPNs) issued to pubs in relation to noise (please provide separately).
5. Number of full-time equivalent officers responsible for noise or environmental protection enforcement

If possible, please provide the data in a table format.

If any part of this request is unclear or likely to exceed the cost limit, please let me know as I am happy to refine the request.

Thank you for your assistance.

Kind regards,

Anna Jordan

Undergraduate Student, BSc Environmental Health

University Centre Weston

WS371707@weston.ac.uk

Questionnaire

January 2026

Research Project: How has noise enforcement by local authorities on pubs in the West Midlands changed between the pre-COVID (2018–2019) and post-COVID (2022–2023) periods.

Researcher: Anna Jordan Undergraduate Student, BSc Environmental Health University Centre



* Required

Participant Information & Consent

A Participant Information Sheet was provided with this questionnaire. Please ensure that you have read and understood the information contained in the Participant Information Sheet and asked any questions before you sign this form. It explains the purpose of the study, what participation involves, confidentiality, and your rights. If you have any questions, please contact **Anna Jordan** at WS371707@weston.ac.uk.

1. I have read the information in the Participant Information Sheet and I consent to take part in this study *

☐ Yes I consent

☐ No, I do not consent

About You

2. Which Local Authority do you work for? *

- ☐ Birmingham City Council
- ☐ Coventry City Council
- ☐ Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
- ☐ Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- ☐ Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- ☐ Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- ☐ City of Wolverhampton Council
- ☐ Shropshire Council
- ☐ Telford & Wrekin Council
- ☐ Staffordshire County Council
- ☐ Cannock Chase District Council
- ☐ East Staffordshire Borough Council
- ☐ Lichfield District Council
- ☐ Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
- ☐ South Staffordshire District Council
- ☐ Stafford Borough Council
- ☐ Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
- ☐ Tamworth Borough Council
- ☐ Warwickshire County Council
- ☐ North Warwickshire Borough Council
- ☐ Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
- ☐ Rugby Borough Council
- ☐ Stratford-on-Avon District Council
- ☐ Warwick District Council
- ☐ Worcestershire Regulatory Services
- ☐ Bromsgrove District Council
- ☐ Malvern Hills District Council
- ☐ Redditch Borough Council
- ☐ Worcester City Council
- ☐ Wychavon District Council
- ☐ Wyre Forest District Council
- ☐ Other

3. What is your job role? *

- ☐ Environmental Health Officer (Covering noise)
- ☐ Licensing Officer
- ☐ Other

4. How many years have you been in your current role? *

- ☐ Less than 2 years
- ☐ 2-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ Over 10 years

5. Approximately what proportion of your workload is pub-noise complaints and/or enforcement? *

- ☐ None
- ☐ Less than 25%
- ☐ 26-50%
- ☐ 51-75%
- ☐ Over 76%

6. Please provide any additional details about your involvement with pub-noise complaints and/or enforcement. *

Pre-Covid (2018-2019)

Please answer the following from your experiences and professional opinion of pub related noise issues during this time period.

7. What was the most frequent type of pub-noise complaint? Please select all that apply. *

- ☐ Live music (internal)
- ☐ Live music (external)
- ☐ Recorded music (internal)
- ☐ Recorded Music (external)
- ☐ Amplified voice (e.g., PA system, microphone use etc.)
- ☐ Consumer noise (i.e. people talking)
- ☐ Anti-social behaviour (i.e. shouting, swearing, drunken behaviour)
- ☐ Other

8. The following statements refer to residents' expectations and attitudes toward pub-related noise. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Residents expected pubs to keep noise low	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents expected strict enforcement of pub noise limits	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents tolerated occasional loud music from pubs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents accepted latenight pub noise as a normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents often complained about pub noise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. What enforcement actions (informal and formal) were most frequently used during this time? Please select all that apply. *

- ☐ Advice
- ☐ Community Protection Warning
- ☐ Community Protection Notice
- ☐ Abatement Notice
- ☐ License review
- ☐ Other

10. In the majority of cases, how would you rate the cooperation of pub management with Local Authority Officers in the handling of noise complaints. *

- ☐ Very cooperative
- ☐ Cooperative
- ☐ Neither cooperative or uncooperative
- ☐ Uncooperative
- ☐ Very uncooperative

11. Across pubs in your jurisdiction, what measures were most commonly implemented in response to noise-related complaints. Please select all that apply. *

- ☐ Reduced music volume
- ☐ Limitation live music / entertainment hours
- ☐ Installation of soundproofing / acoustic mitigation
- ☐ Reconfiguration of premises layout (i.e. relocation of speakers)
- ☐ Increased staff monitoring (i.e. observations, decibel metre etc.)
- ☐ Noise Management Plan
- ☐ No changes implemented
- ☐ Other

12. How effective and/or ineffective were these noise measures in controlling and reducing noise impact. *

Post-Covid (2022-2023)

Please answer the following from your experiences and professional opinion of pub related noise issues during this time period.

13. What was the most frequent type of pub-noise complaint? Please select all that apply. *

- ☐ Live music (internal)
- ☐ Live music (external)
- ☐ Recorded music (internal)
- ☐ Recorded Music (external)
- ☐ Consumer noise (i.e. people talking)
- ☐ Anti-social behaviour (i.e. shouting, swearing, drunken behaviour)
- ☐ Other

14. The following statements refer to residents' expectations and attitudes toward pub-related noise. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Residents expected pubs to keep noise low	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents expected strict enforcement of pub noise limits	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents tolerated occasional loud music from pubs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents accepted latenight pub noise as a normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents often complained about pub noise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. What enforcement actions (informal and formal) were most frequently used during this time? Please select all that apply. *

- ☐ Advice
- ☐ Community Protection Warning
- ☐ Community Protection Notice
- ☐ Abatement Notice
- ☐ License review
- ☐ Other

16. How co-operative have pub management been with Local Authority Officers in response to noise complaints? *

- ☐ Very cooperative
- ☐ Cooperative
- ☐ Neither cooperative or uncooperative
- ☐ Uncooperative
- ☐ Very uncooperative

17. Across pubs in your jurisdiction, what measures were most commonly implemented in response to noise-related complaints. Please select all that apply. *

- ☐ Reduced music volume
- ☐ Limitation live music / entertainment hours
- ☐ Installation of soundproofing / acoustic mitigation
- ☐ Reconfiguration of premises layout (i.e. relocation of speakers)
- ☐ Increased staff monitoring (i.e. observations, decibel metre etc.)
- ☐ Noise Management Plan
- ☐ No changes implemented
- ☐ Other

18. How effective and/or ineffective were these noise measures in controlling and reducing noise impact. *

19. Are there initiatives or procedures within your local authority to monitor or address pub related noise? Please explain. *

Legislation

Which legislation is most commonly used to address pub-related noise issues in your local authority? *

- ☐ Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- ☐ Environmental Protection Act 1990
- ☐ Licensing Act 2003
- ☐ Noise Act 1996
- ☐ Other

20. How effective do you consider the following legislation on addressing pub-related noise issues? *

	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Very ineffective
Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Environmental Protection Act 1990	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Licensing Act 2003	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Noise Act 1996	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

21. In your professional opinion, are there any gaps in current legislation that affect officers' ability to manage and/or enforce on pub-related noise. *

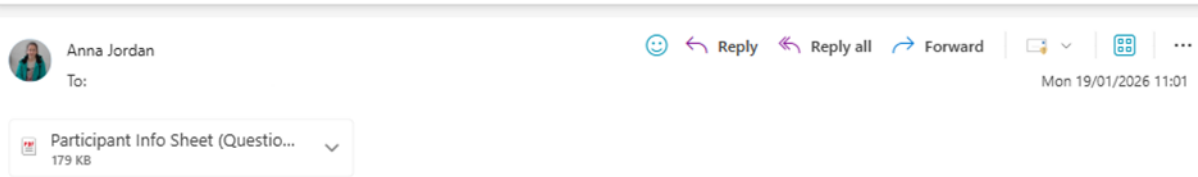
Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, the information you have provided is incredibly valuable and will play an important role in shaping this study. As mentioned in the initial email, we will be conducting follow-up interviews to explore this topic in more depth. If you would be open to being contacted for a brief interview, please indicate your consent below. Please note selection for the interview will be subject to response numbers.

22. To be contacted for an interview, please provide your full name and email address:

9.5 Appendix E: Questionnaire Distribution Email

Request for Participation in Research on Pub-Related Noise Questionnaire



Good morning, please can this email be forwarded to the Environmental Health department.

Dear Environmental Health Team and Relevant Officers,

I am conducting academic research as part of my BSc Environmental Health dissertation at University Centre Weston. The study examines how noise complaints and enforcement relating to pubs (public houses) in the West Midlands have changed between the pre-COVID period (2018–2019) and the post-COVID period (2022–2023).

As part of this research, I am seeking input from officers working in relevant areas such as Environmental Health, Licensing, or noise enforcement. Your experience and professional insight are essential to understanding how complaint patterns, enforcement actions, and the use of statutory powers may have changed across the two periods.

I would be very grateful if you could complete the questionnaire linked below, or forward it to the appropriate members of your team:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=FgfhBifCK0ggQ-seKHrH92mOe1usoo5KsifNQNEiHkFUQpZCSUJJS0IzTTZQMDFBSVVQOEu0VFZaVY4u>

The questionnaire takes approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Personal information will be anonymised in the final report, and data will be stored securely in line with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. I have attached the **Participant Information and Consent Sheet**, which provides further details about the study and should be shared with any colleagues who may take part. At the end of the questionnaire, participants may also choose to volunteer for a follow-up interview.

I would be grateful if responses could be submitted by **10th February 2026**.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,
Anna Jordan
Undergraduate Student, BSc Environmental Health

9.6 Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet: Questionnaire

Title of Research Project:

How has noise enforcement by local authorities on pubs in the West Midlands changed between the pre-COVID (2018–2019) and post-COVID (2022–2023) periods.

Researcher

Anna Jordan Undergraduate Student, BSc Environmental Health
University Centre Weston
Contact email: WS371707@weston.ac.uk

Supervisor: Minakshi Bhattacharjee

Contact email: Minakshi.b@weston.ac.uk

Purpose of the Research

As part of my final year dissertation at University Centre Weston, I am conducting research to investigate noise from pubs pre- and post- Covid, specifically focusing on:

- What are the variations in noise complaints and enforcement actions related to pubs across selected West Midlands LAs between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023.
- How do LA officers perceive the changes in noise-related issues and enforcement post-pandemic.
- How enforcement procedures and statutory powers relating to pub-related noise were used across the two periods, and how these practices correspond with relevant legislative requirements.

The aim of this research is to explore and compare the pre- and post-Covid impact of noise complaints on pubs and the Local Authority's perceptions and ability to enforce these changes.

Your Participation

As an Environmental Health officer and/or Licencing officer within the Local Authority, your job role and experience will provide important insights into the pre- and post- Covid changes in managing and enforcing noise from pubs pre- and post- Covid.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire, which will take approximately **10-15 minutes**. The questionnaire will feature questions on your experiences with pub-noise complaints, community expectations, enforcement actions during Pre-Covid (2018-2019) and Post Covid (2022-2023).

At the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked if the researcher can contact you for a follow-up interview. Subject to numbers, if you agree to participate and are selected, you will be asked to complete an interview, which will take approximately **30 minutes**. The interview will be conducted remotely via MS Teams for convenience, or an in-person interview can be organised if preferred. The interview will involve a more in-depth of your perceptions and experiences of noise from pubs pre- and post-Covid, enforcement, and legislation.

Data

Results from the questionnaire will support the analysis of additional data collected for this research. Therefore, in the final report, reference may be made towards your local authority, however you will be asked for consent to provide this information and you can opt out of this. Your personal information will be anonymised in the final report to protect your identity.

Data collected from the interview will be recorded to ensure the transcription and analysis are accurate. All information you provide will be treated as confidential. Your responses and personal information will be anonymised in the final report to protect your identity.

The information you provide will be securely stored on an encrypted device, all files will be stored in password-protected folder with accessibility limited to the researcher and supervisor where necessary. This is to ensure that all personal data is protected from unauthorised individuals in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR. Once the research is completed, all personal data including audio recordings, will be deleted after a predetermined retention period (six months post-submission).

For more information please see: [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#).

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Participation in this research study is voluntary, please carefully consider all of the provided information before you decide. If you agree to participate, you have a right to withdraw from the study without a given reason.

Withdrawals can be made up to **14 days after completion of the questionnaire and interview**. Please contact me via WS371707@weston.ac.uk. All data associated with your participation will be removed upon withdrawal.

Potential Risks and Benefits

This study is designed to have minimal risks for participants. Nevertheless, topics focusing on the impacts of Covid in a professional setting may be challenging for some participants to discuss. Therefore, during the questionnaire and interview data collection, you have control over how much information you wish to provide, as well as the right to withdraw from the research at any given time.

Your first-hand experience and expertise will provide a critical contribution to this study's examination of local authority officers' perspectives on the enforcement and management of noise issues related to pubs.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any questions about this research or your participation, please do not hesitate to contact me at WS371707@weston.ac.uk. You may also contact my supervisor Minakshi Bhattacharjee at Minakshi.b@weston.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time and consideration into being a part of this research study. Your participation and knowledge into this topic would be greatly appreciated.

9.7 Appendix G: UWE Ethics Application



University of the
West of England

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

This application form should be completed by members of staff and PhD/ Prof Doc students undertaking research which involves human participants. Undergraduate and Masters level students are required to complete this application form where their project has been referred for review by a supervisor to a Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) in accordance with the policy at <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/researchethics>. For research using human tissue, please see separate policy, procedures and guidance linked from <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/researchethics/policyandprocedures.aspx>

Please note that the process takes **up to six weeks** from receipt of a valid application. **The research should not commence until written approval has been received from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) or Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC).** You should bear this in mind when setting a start date for the project.

APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of Applicant*	Anna Jordan		
Faculty	Weston College	Department	Environmental Health
Status: Staff/PG Student/ MSc Student/ Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Email address	WS371707@weston.ac.uk
Contact postal address	4 Priorsfield, Ewyas Harold, Hereford, Herefordshire, HR2 0TX		
Name of co-researchers* (where applicable)	N/A		

*This form must include the name of the UWE Project Manager (normally the budget holder and PI)

FOR STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

Name of Supervisor/Director of Studies	Dr. Minakshi Bhattacharjee		
Detail of course/degree for which research is being undertaken	BSc (Hons) Environmental Health Practitioner degree apprenticeship		
Supervisor's/Director of Studies' email address	minakshi.b@weston.ac.uk		
Supervisor's/ Director of Studies' comments	<i>Please note the supervisor must add comments here. Failure to do so will result in the application being returned.</i> The proposed study is well-designed- and merits further research, addressing a timely and relevant topic. The student has demonstrated the necessary skills and methodological awareness to carry out the research effectively. The participant information sheet is clear and appropriate, ensuring transparency for participants. Procedures for recruitment and the obtaining of informed consent are sound, ethically robust, and in line with best practice. Approved.		
For student applications, supervisors should ensure that all of the following are satisfied before the study begins: • The topic merits further research; • The student has the skills to carry out the research; • The participant information sheet is appropriate; • The procedures for recruitment of research participants and obtained informed consent are appropriate.			

PROJECT DETAILS

Project title	How has noise enforcement by local authorities on pubs in the West Midlands changed between the pre-COVID (2018–2019) and post-COVID (2022–2023) periods.		
Is this project externally funded?	No		
If externally funded please give PASS reference			
Proposed start date for the research	November 2025	Anticipated project end date	April 2026

Fieldwork should not begin until ethics approval has been given

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED WORK

1. Aims, objectives of and background to the research

This should provide the reviewer of the application with sufficient detail to allow them to understand the nature of the project and its rationale, and the ethical context, in terms which are clear to a lay reader. Do not assume that the reader knows you or your area of work. You may provide a copy of your research proposal in addition to completing this section. Please try to keep within 500 words.

Answer here:

Covid-19 has significantly altered the dynamics the nighttime economy and how the Local Authority (LA) regulates businesses such as pubs. March 2020 saw the first national lockdown announced and forced a widespread closure of pubs across the UK, many of which never reopened. As Covid restrictions began to lift and pubs were reopened to the public and relocated live and recorded music to outdoor areas to comply with remaining public health measures. By early 2022, all Covid restrictions were lifted, many pubs continued to utilise their outdoor areas for entertainment as an additional source of income. As a result, this has seen an increase in noise complaints from local residents. Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) (2024) revealed from a recent Freedom of Information request from 20 London Councils a '53% rise in noise complaints in London from 2018 to 2022/23.' The post pandemic era sets out new challenges for the LA to balance the restoration of pubs in the nighttime economy, appropriate regulation of these premises and consideration on the impact on the local residents.

This research aims to explore the pre- and post-Covid patterns in complaints related to pub noise and the LA's capacity to enforce regulations. It will examine the influence of temporary Covid policies on pub-related noise and enforcement practices. The study also investigates changes in the frequency and type of enforcement actions and how LA staff perceive noise-related issues and enforcement in the post-pandemic period.

Objectives include:

- What are the variations in noise complaints and enforcement actions related to pubs across selected West Midlands LAs between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023.
- How do LA officers perceive the changes in noise-related issues and enforcement post-pandemic.
- To what extent did temporary Covid policies have a lasting effect on noise levels or enforcement.

2. Research methodology to be used

You should explain how you plan to undertake your research. A copy of the interview schedule/questionnaire/observation schedule/focus group topic guide should be attached where applicable.

Answer here:

The data collected will be a mixed method approach using both quantitative and qualitative data in the form of FOI requests, questionnaire and interviews.

FOI requests made to approximately 30 councils across the West Midlands region with the focus of obtaining relative data on:

- Number of pub-related noise complaints (per year, 2018–2023)
- Number and type of enforcement actions taken (e.g., informal warnings, abatement notices, prosecutions).
- Council resources and staffing levels for noise enforcement department.

The questionnaire will feature both closed and open questions to enable both quantitative and qualitative analysis, covering the following topics:

- Section 1: Participant Information
- Section 2: Noise Complaints
- Section 3: Enforcement
- Section 4: Compliance and Community Relations
- Section 5: Legislation and Licensing
- Section 6: Reflections

At the end of the questionnaire, participants will be asked if they can be contacted for a follow-up interview.

Subject to numbers, participants will be selected for individual interviews to discuss more in-depth their answers from the questionnaire open-questions such as their perceptions and experiences of noise from pubs pre- and post-Covid, enforcement, and legislation.

3. Selection of participants

You must indicate if any of the participants in your sample group are in the categories listed. Research involving adult participants who might not have the capacity to consent or who fall under the Mental Capacity Act must be reviewed either by an NHS Research Ethics Committee or the [National Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#).

If your proposed research involves contact with children or vulnerable adults, or others of the specified categories below, you may need to hold a valid DBS check. Evidence of a DBS check should take the form of an email from the relevant counter signatory confirming the researcher has a valid DBS check for working with children and/or vulnerable adults. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide this confirmation.

Members of staff requiring DBS checks should contact Human Resources hr@uwe.ac.uk. DBS checks for students are usually organised through the student's faculty, but students in faculties without a DBS counter signatory should contact Leigh Taylor (Leigh.Taylor@uwe.ac.uk).

Answer here:

N/A

Will the participants be from any of the following groups? ('x' as appropriate)

- ☐ Children under 18*
- ☐ Adults who are unable to consent for themselves
- ☐ Adults who are unconscious, very severely ill or have a terminal illness
- ☐ Adults in emergency situations
- ☐ Adults with mental illness (particularly if detained under Mental Health Legislation)
- ☐ Prisoners
- ☐ Young Offenders
- ☐ Healthy Volunteers (where procedures may be adverse or invasive)
- ☐ Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes, medical students
- ☐ Other vulnerable groups
- ☒ None of the above

** If you are researching with children please provide details of completed relevant safeguarding training.*

If any of the above applies, please justify their inclusion in this research.

4. Please explain how you will determine your sample size/recruitment strategy, and identify, approach and recruit your participants. Please explain arrangements made for participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information in English

In this section, you should explain the rationale for your sample size and describe how you will identify and approach potential participants and recruit them to your study.

Answer here:

The FOI requests will be purposefully sampled from approximately 30 councils across the West Midlands region. Due to this being a short-term research study, it was only appropriate to condense the sampling of data to a specific region of the UK. This ensures that the data and results are manageable but representative of this area.

The recruitment process for the questionnaire is to contact the councils directly through email, introducing the research objectives and requesting participation if relevant EHO's and relevant officers. This is a purposeful sampling method by targeting relevant officers within the local

authorities that will have the specialised knowledge and expertise on this topic, to participate in this research.

The interviews will be will follow the questionnaire responses and thematic saturation will be used as a guide. It is likely this will be a smaller sample size, which will allow for more in-depth discussion with participants about their own experiences and opinions.

As the participants targeted for this study are officers within local authorities in the UK, it is highly likely that participants will be fluent in English. However, to ensure that the research remains inclusive and ethically sound, provisions can be made available to ensure all participants can fully engage in the study. These could include, providing materials such as consent forms, information sheets and questionnaires in simplified English. During the interviews, participants will also be provided with the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to ensure full comprehension of their role in the research.

5. What are your arrangements for obtaining informed consent whether written, verbal or other? (where applicable, copies of participant information sheets and consent forms should be provided)

Informed consent is an ethical requirement of most research. Applicants should demonstrate that they are conversant with and have given due consideration to the need for informed consent and that any consent forms prepared for the study ensure that potential research participants are given sufficient information about a study, in a format they understand, to enable them to exercise their right to make an informed decision whether or not to participate in a research study.

You should describe how you will obtain informed consent from the participants and, where this is written consent, include copies of participant information sheets and consent forms. Where other forms of consent are obtained (eg verbal, recorded) you should explain the processes you intend to use. If you do not intend to seek consent or are using covert methods, you need to explain and justify your approach. Please consider carefully whether or not you need to seek consent for archiving or re-use of data.

Answer here:

Participant information sheets and consent forms will be included with the questionnaire distribution. The sheet will clearly outline the purpose of the research, objectives, methodology and what is required as a participant. The document will also clearly state the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any time and confidentiality measures that are in place for their personal details including specifically stating what data will be anonymised. The participant will have to tick and/or sign the relevant box before filling out the questionnaire. Participants will also be asked at the end of the questionnaire if they consent to being contacted by the researcher for an interview. Only participants that have agreed to be contacted will be considered for this next phase.

During organising and scheduling of the interviews, a consent form will be distributed to the potential participants to reiterate their rights and how this research will use and store their data collected through the interview recordings and transcription. Whilst written confirmation is

requested prior to the interview, this will also be verbally stated at the start of the interview to ensure clarity.

6. What arrangements are in place for participants to withdraw from the study?

Consent must be freely given with sufficient detail to indicate what participating in the study will involve and how they may withdraw. There should be no penalty for withdrawing and the participant is not required to provide any reason.

Please note: allowing participants to withdraw at any time could prejudice your ability to complete your research. It may be appropriate to set a fixed final withdrawal date.

Answer here:

The Participation Information Sheet provides a clearly outline of the aims, participation and use of data collected for this research study. Participants are advised to read the information sheet carefully before signing the consent form. It is clearly stated that any involvement in this study is voluntary and if agreed, they have a right to withdraw from the study without a given reason. Withdrawals can be made up to 14 days after completion of the questionnaire and interview. They have been provided with the relevant contact details to request this withdrawal. For participants that have elected to withdraw, all identifying details will be removed to ensure their privacy.

7. If the research generates personal data, please describe the arrangements for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality (or the reasons for not doing so)

You should explain what measures you plan to take to ensure that the information provided by research participants is anonymised/pseudonymised (where appropriate) and how it will be kept confidential. In the event that the data are not to be anonymised/pseudonymised, please provide a justification.

Personal data is defined as 'personal information about a living person which is being, or which will be processed as part of a relevant filing system. This personal information includes for example, opinions, photographs and voice recordings' (UWE Data Protection Act 1998, Guidance for Employees).

Answer here:

The personal data generated from this research includes voice recordings from the interviews and opinions stated in the questionnaire and interview. To support the analysis and validity of the data collected during this research study, the final report may refer to the specific local authorities. However, participants will be asked prior to this for consent to feature this information in the report and will be advised that they can opt out. All personal information will be anonymised in the final report to protect the individual's identity. All names will be anonymised, reference may only be made towards their local authority. Care will be taken when handling participants personal data and information to ensure confidentiality and compliance with GDPR laws.

8. Please describe how you will store data collected in the course of your research and maintain data Security and protection.

Describe how you will store the data, who will have access to it, and what happens to it at the end of the project, including any arrangements for long-term storage of data and potential re-use. If your research is externally funded, the research sponsors may have specific requirements for retention of records. You should consult the terms and conditions of grant awards for details.

It may be appropriate for the research data to be offered to a data archive for re-use. If this is the case, it is important that consent for this is included in the participant consent form.

UWE IT Services provides data protection and encryption facilities - see http://www.uwe.ac.uk/its-staff/corporate/ourpolicies/intranet/encryption_facilities_provided_by_uwe_itservices.shtml

Answer here:

All data collected, including questionnaire answers and voice recordings from interviews through MS Teams will be stored on encrypted device. All files will be stored in password-protected folder with accessibility limited to the researcher and supervisor where necessary. Ensures all personal data is protected from unauthorised individuals.

All data will be processed in line with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, ensuring the secure handling of personal data. Once the research is completed, all personal data including audio recordings, will be deleted after a predetermined retention period (six months post-submission).

9. What risks (eg physical, psychological, social, legal or economic), if any, do the participants face in taking part in this research and how will you address these risks?

Describe ethical issues related to the physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of the participants, and what you will do to protect their wellbeing. If you do not envisage there being any risks to the participants, please make it clear that you have considered the possibility and justify your approach.

Answer here:

Risks are minimal for this research as data collection involved FOI requests and questionnaires with select follow-up interviews. The interviews will be discussing officer perceptions and experiences of noise from pubs pre- and post- Covid, which is unlikely to cause any significant social or psychological harm to participants, nevertheless topics focusing on the impacts of Covid in a professional setting may be challenging for some participants to discuss. To minimise potential risks, considerations have been taken to provide participants control over their involvement. This includes but is not limited to, right to withdraw and skip questions. Participant well-being is of high importance and will be prioritised throughout the process of this research project.

10. Are there any potential risks to researchers and any other people impacted by this study as a consequence of undertaking this Research that are greater than those encountered in normal day to day life?

Describe any health and safety issues including risks and dangers for both the participants and yourself (if appropriate) and what you will do about them. This might include, for instance, arrangements to ensure that a supervisor or co-researcher has details of your whereabouts and a means of contacting you when you conduct interviews away from your base; or ensuring that a 'chaperone' is available if necessary for one-to-one interviews.

Please check to confirm you have carried out a risk assessment for your research ☐

Answer here:

No significant risks outside of day-to-day activities have been highlighted.

To ensure all potential health and safety concerns are thoroughly considered and reviewed, some additional measures will be put in place:

- Questionnaires will be distributed via email through a link, therefore there is no risk to in travelling or attending the council offices required for this study.
- Remote interviews through MS Teams using phone or video conferencing, this will mitigate a lot of potential health and safety risks.
- In-person interviews, whilst all interviews are proposed to be carried out via MS Teams for ease and convenience for both the researcher and participant, consideration have been taken if interviews are conducted face-to-face. To minimise any risk to both the researcher and participant, the interview will take place in a safe and neutral location, such as the researcher's office space or agreed public place, the location and time will be agreed in advance.

11. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated?

Please indicate in which forms and formats the results of the research will be communicated.

(Select all that apply)

- ☒ Peer reviewed journal
- ☒ Conference presentation
- ☒ Internal report
- ☒ Dissertation/Thesis
- ☒ Other publication
- ☐ Written feedback to research participants
- ☒ Presentation to participants or relevant community groups

☒ Digital Media

☐ Other (Please specify below)

12. Will your research be taking place overseas?

If you intend to undertake research overseas, please provide details of additional issues which this may raise, and describe how you will address these. Eg language, culture, legal framework, insurance, data protection, political climate, health and safety. Please also clarify whether or not ethics approval will be sought locally in another country.

Answer here:

N/A – all research carried out within the UK.

13. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of the Faculty and/or University Research Ethics Committee?

This gives the researcher the opportunity to raise any other ethical issues considered in planning the research or which the researcher feels need raising with the Committee.

Answer here:

There are no significant ethical issues that need to be addressed in addition to those mentioned in this application. However, some points were identified during the planning process of this research for analysing the data, which includes:

- For officers working within identifiable local authorities, their comments could inadvertently reveal their identity or employer, especially in small councils. This has been outlined on the information sheet and participants can withdraw from any reference of their local authority been mentioned in the final report. Care will also be taken to limit the information provided that may identify the officer of that local authority.
- Whilst participants identify will be anonymised in the final report, care will be taken to ensure that any quotes used from the questionnaire or interview are not taken out of context or misrepresented.

CHECKLIST

Please complete before submitting the form

Please note: supporting documentation should include version numbers and dates

	Yes/No
Is a copy of the research proposal attached?	Yes
Have you explained how you will select the participants?	Yes
Is a participant information sheet attached?	Yes
Is a participant consent form attached?	Yes
Is a copy of your questionnaire/topic guide attached?	Yes
Have you described the ethical issues related to the well-being of participants?	Yes
Have you described fully how you will maintain confidentiality?	Yes
Have you included details of data protection including data storage?	Yes
Where applicable, is evidence of a current DBS (formerly CRB) check attached?	Not required
Is a Risk Assessment form attached? (HAS only)	Not required
Have you considered health and safety issues for the participants and researchers?	Yes

DECLARATION

The information contained in this application, including any accompanying information, is to the best of my knowledge, complete and correct. I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations and the right of the participants.

Principal Investigator name	Anna Jordan
Signature	
Date	30/10/2025

Supervisor or module leader name (where appropriate)	Dr. Minakshi Bhattacharjee
Signature	
Date	27/11/2025

The signed form should be submitted electronically to Committee Services: researchethics@uwe.ac.uk and email copied to the Supervisor/Director of Studies where applicable together with all supporting documentation (research proposal, participant information sheet, consent form etc).

For student applications where an electronic signature is not available from the Supervisor we will require an email from the Supervisor confirming support.

Please provide all the information requested and justify where appropriate.

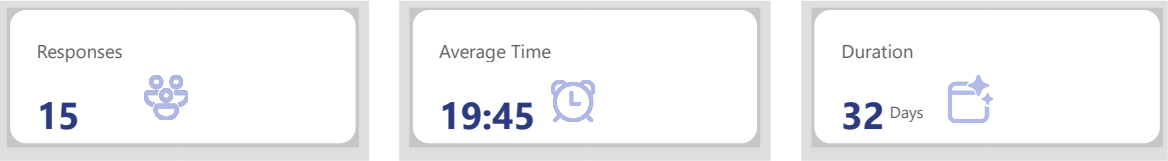
For further guidance, please see <http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/researchethics> (applicants' information)

9.8 Appendix H: FOI Data Results

Council	Noise complaints (pub) 2018-19	Noise complaints (pub) 2022-23	Abatement Notices 2018-19	Abatement Notices 2022-23	Licensing Reviews 2018-19	Licensing Reviews 2022-23	CPW's 2018-19	CPW's 2022-23	CPN's 2018-19	CPN's 2022-23	FTE Officers 2018-19	FTE Officers 2022-23	Notes
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council		139		3		0		1		0	7	7	The team does not have officers dedicated solely to noise issues. Instead, there are seven Community Protection Officers who investigate statutory nuisance complaints alongside a wider remit that includes Anti-Social Behaviour, unauthorised encampments, fly-tipping, domestic accumulations, highways, and licensing enforcement.
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council	49	20	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	6	6	
Rugby Borough Council	26				0		0		0		1	1	
Stratford-on-Avon District Council	65	47	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	x	x	
Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council	16	27	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	
Lichfield District Council	19	33	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	
South Staffordshire District Council	30	94	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	
Birmingham City Council	385	618	6	3	20	11	0	0	0	0	5	5	
Shropshire Council	187	218	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	8	6	
City of Wolverhampton Council	21	31	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	<1	<1	
Warwick District Council	34	80	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7.8	6.9	
Stafford Borough Council	19	33	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2.5	2.5	
East Staffordshire Borough Council													This is a nil response. Do not record the type of premises that the noise is associated with and therefore cannot identify which noise complaints are related to a pub.
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	39	32	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	
Telford & Wrekin Council	85	33	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	
North Warwickshire Borough Council	27	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	60	184	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6.6	
Bromsgrove District Council	N/A	54	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	1.5	1.5	Retention and Disposal Policy prevents the retention of complaints after a 6 year period so I cannot provide data for the time period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2019 for questions 1-4.
Malvern Hills District Council	N/A	8	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	1.5	1.5	
Redditch Borough Council	N/A	21	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	1.5	1.5	
Worcester City Council	N/A	56	N/A	2	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	1.5	1.5	
Wychavon District Council	N/A	24	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	1.5	1.5	
Wyre Forest District Council	N/A	49	N/A	1	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	1.5	1.5	
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	77	106	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	2018-19 data was from 2019 only. Included clubs and restaurants in this request. Officers counted in the last question are not just responsible for noise, they cover all elements of environmental compliance work including housing enforcement.
Cannock Chase District Council	9	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	
Tamworth Borough Council	26	27	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	
Herefordshire Council	110	175	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4.4	

9.9 Appendix I: Questionnaire Responses

Responses Overview Closed



1. I have read the information in the Participant Information Sheet and I consent to take part in this study

- Yes I consent 15
- No, I do not consent 0

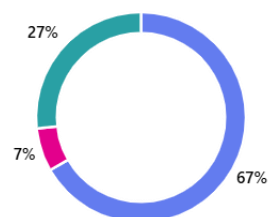


2. Which Local Authority do you work for?



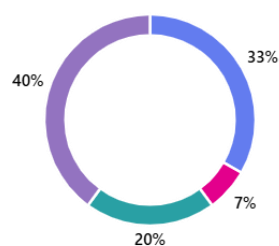
3. What is your job role?

Environmental Health Officer (Covering noise)	10
Licensing Officer	1
Other	4



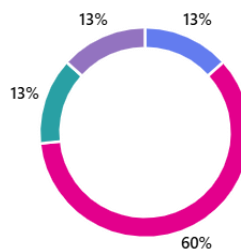
4. How many years have you been in your current role?

Less than 2 years	5
2-5 years	1
6-10 years	3
Over 10 years	6



5. Approximately what proportion of your workload is pub-noise complaints and/or enforcement?

None	2
Less than 25%	9
26-50%	2
51-75%	2
Over 76%	0



6. Please provide any additional details about your involvement with pub-noise complaints and/or enforcement.

Latest Responses

"I used to work for Dudley Council and regularly investigated issues with noise fro..."

15

Responses

"I have worked in Local Government Environmental Protection for 23 years, of whi..."

"Noise complaint investigation"

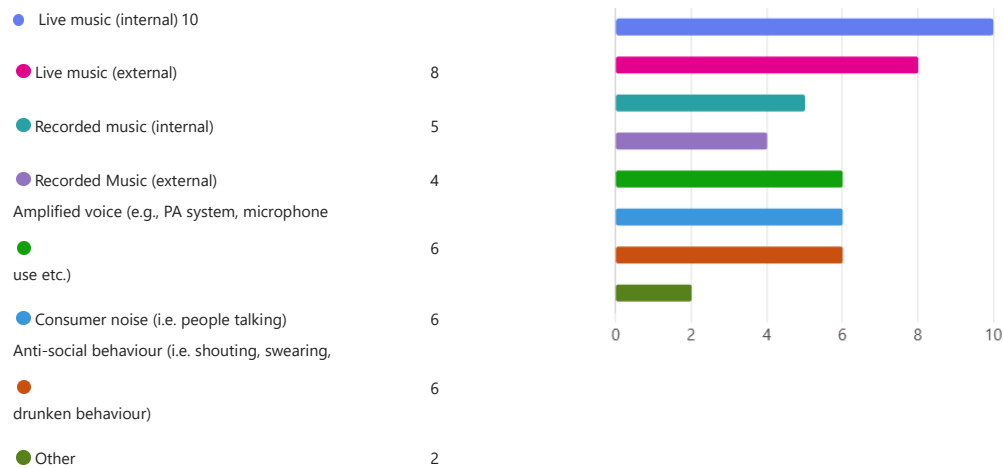
...

7 respondents (50%) answered noise complaints for this question.

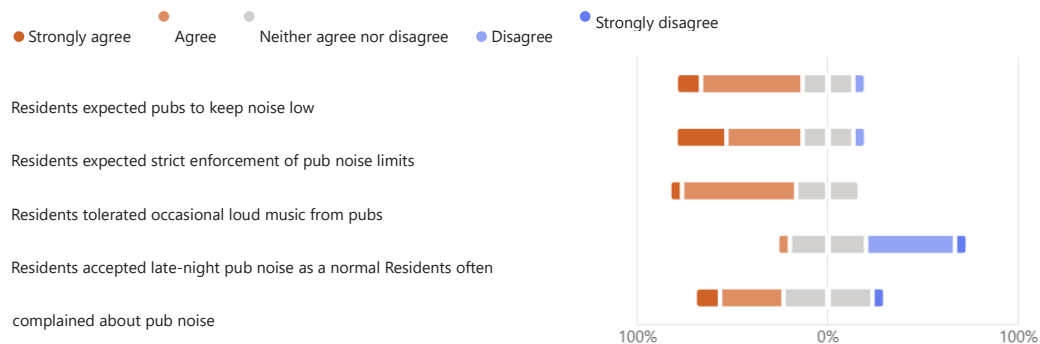
Update

licensing consultations licensing officers Licensing enforcement
noise monitoring noise nuisance **noise complaints** pub noise public complaints
licensed premises licence applications licensing team licensing checks

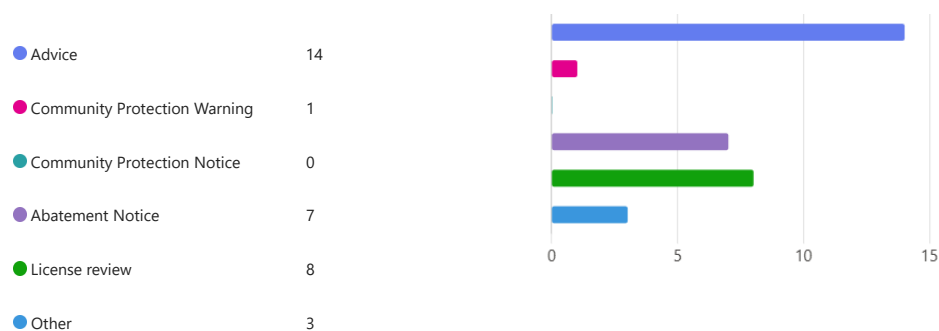
7. What was the most frequent type of pub-noise complaint? Please select all that apply.



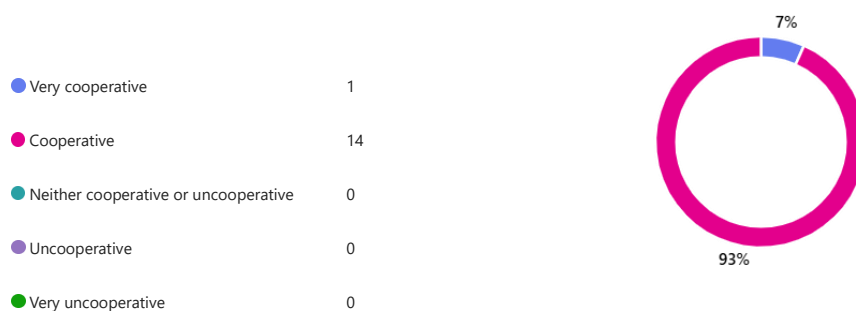
8. The following statements refer to residents' expectations and attitudes toward pub-related noise. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.



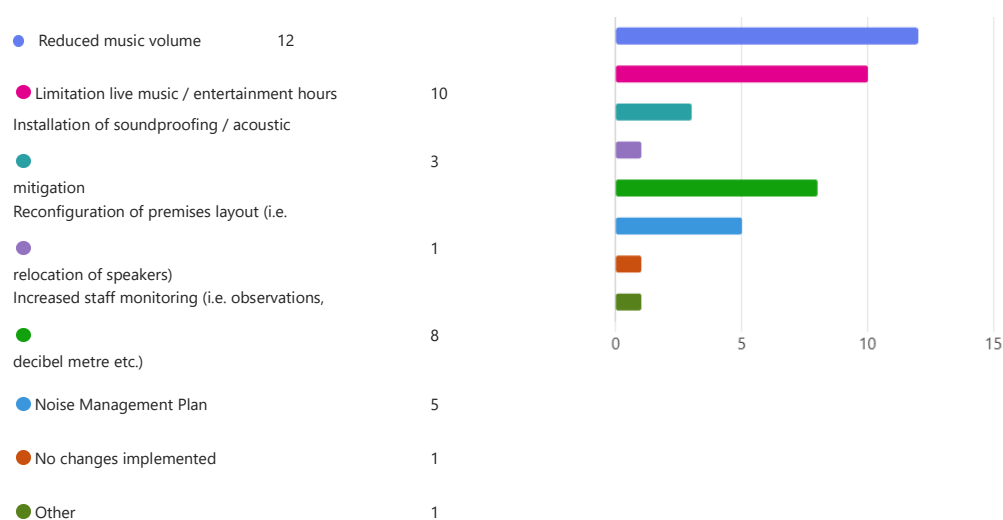
9. What enforcement actions (informal and formal) were most frequently used during this time? Please select all that apply.



10. In the majority of cases, how would you rate the cooperation of pub management with Local Authority Officers in the handling of noise complaints.



11. Across pubs in your jurisdiction, what measures were most commonly implemented in response to noise-related complaints. Please select all that apply.



12. How effective and/or ineffective were these noise measures in controlling and reducing noise impact.

Latest Responses

"sometimes very effective."

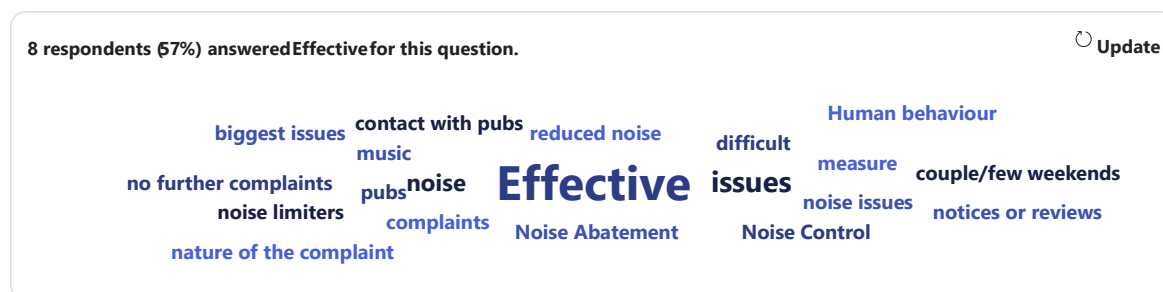
15

"Depending on the nature of the complaint, most measures resulted in no further ... "

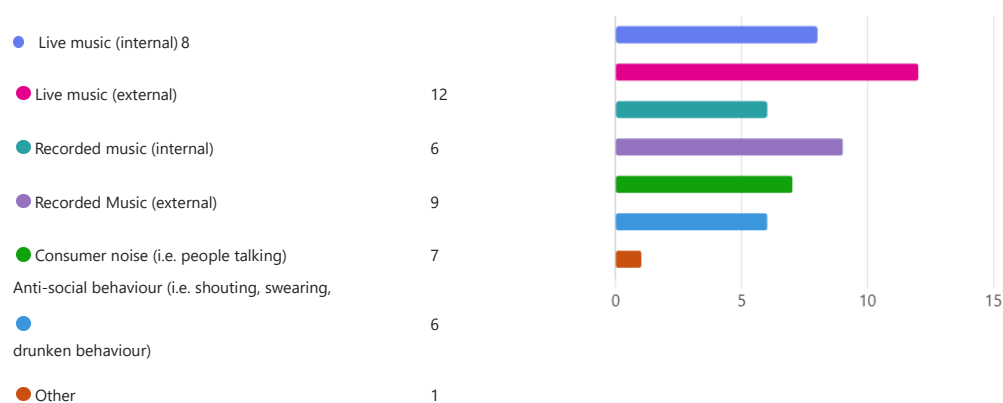
Responses

"Very effective as Pubs don't want to lose their businesses."

...



13. What was the most frequent type of pub-noise complaint? Please select all that apply.



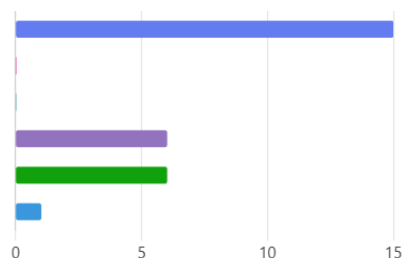
14. The following statements refer to residents' expectations and attitudes toward pub-related noise. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree



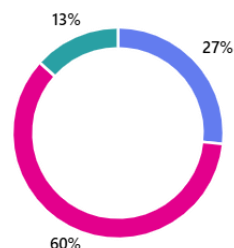
15. What enforcement actions (informal and formal) were most frequently used during this time? Please select all that apply.

Advice 15
Community Protection Warning 0
Community Protection Notice 0
Abatement Notice 6
License review 6
Other 1



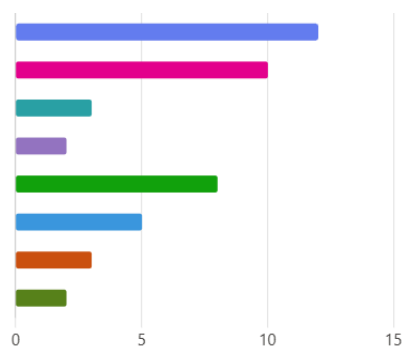
16. How co-operative have pub management been with Local Authority Officers in response to noise complaints?

Very cooperative 4
Cooperative 9
Neither cooperative or uncooperative 2
Uncooperative 0
Very uncooperative 0

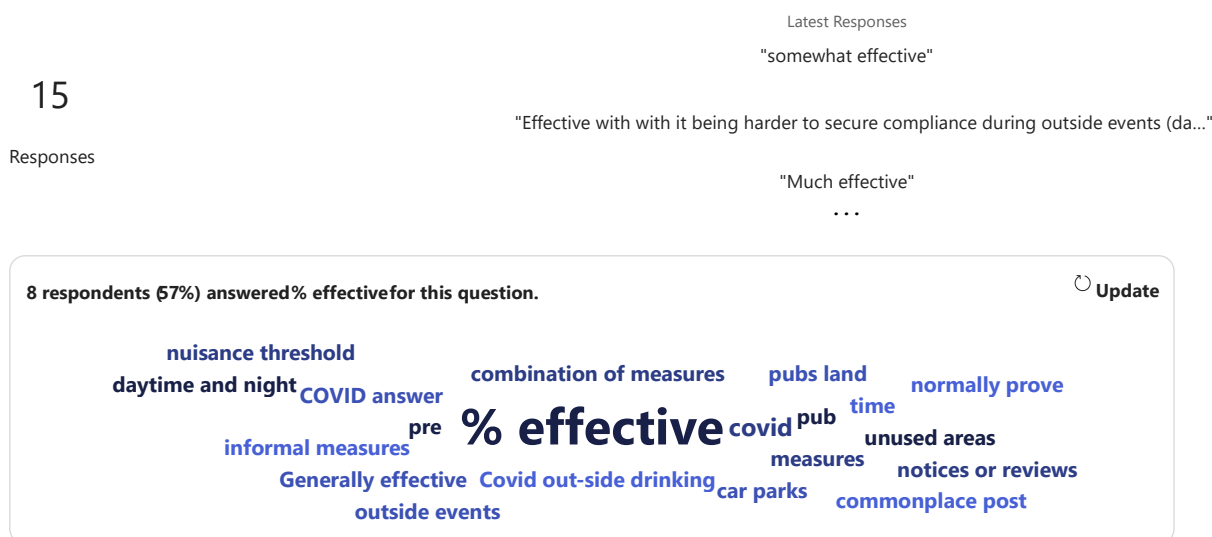


17. Across pubs in your jurisdiction, what measures were most commonly implemented in response to noise-related complaints. Please select all that apply.

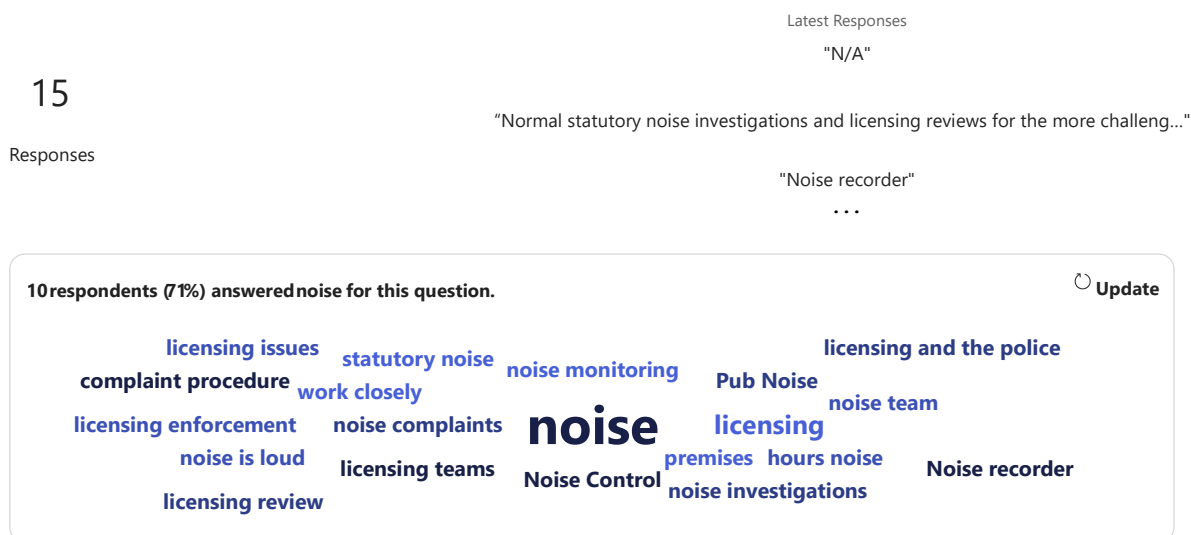
Reduced music volume 12
Limitation live music / entertainment hours 10
Installation of soundproofing / acoustic mitigation 3
Reconfiguration of premises layout (i.e. relocation of speakers) 2
Increased staff monitoring (i.e. observations, decibel metre etc.) 8
Noise Management Plan 5
No changes implemented 3
Other 2



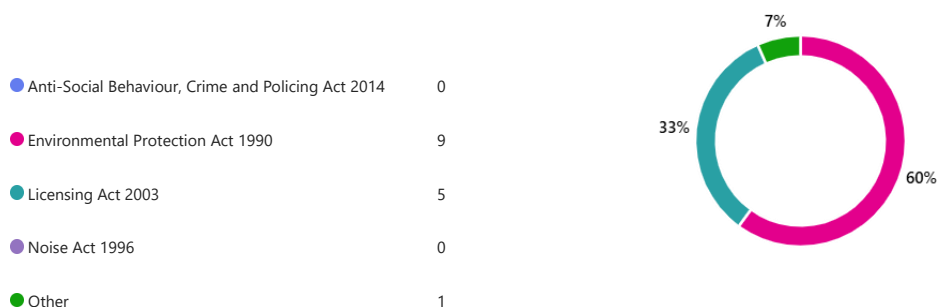
18. How effective and/or ineffective were these noise measures in controlling and reducing noise impact.



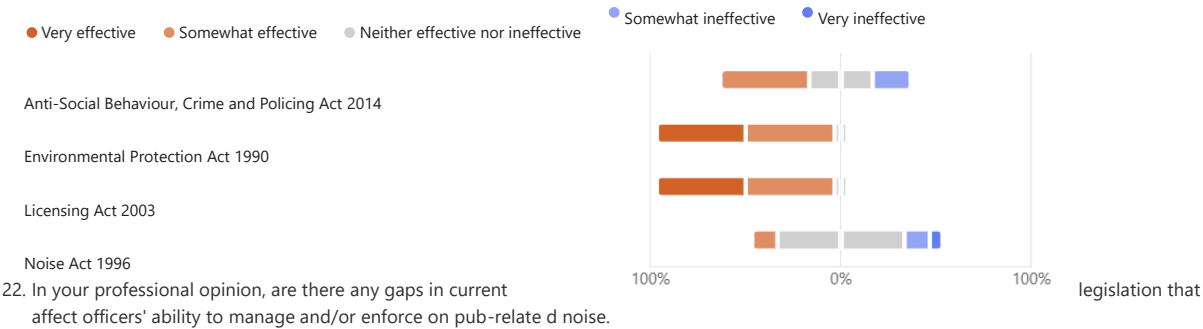
19. Are there initiatives or procedures within your local authority to monitor or address pub-related noise? Please explain.



20. Which legislation is most commonly used to address pub-related noise issues in your local authority?



21. How effective do you consider the following legislation on addressing pub-related noise issues?



15 Responses

Latest Responses

"N/A"

"No"

"The load of evidence gathering to prove that, the noise is a statutory nuisance."

...

5 respondents (6%) answered pubs for this question.

Update

occasional music Statutory nuisance noise control abatement notice licensing application level of noise

nuisance is not noise nuisance pubs issue use licence music from pubs

pub management Live Music Music Act noisy pubs

deterrent for pubs definition of a pub

23. To be contacted for an interview, please provide your full name and email address:

7 Responses

Latest Responses

...

9.10 Appendix J: Anonymised Interview Part Transcript

9.10.1 Participant 1 (P1)

Date: 2 March 2026, 02:01pm

Duration: Approx. 33 minutes

Researcher

So, this is just really just to get a bit more of an in-depth kind of your of your perception of COVID and the impact of noise from pubs. I understand you predominantly still covering noise in environmental health?

Interviewee (P1)

Yeah, that's what I do, mainly pubs and clubs, that type of thing. It's obviously quite seasonal. A lot of the noise comes from outdoor beer gardens. So this time of year, it's relatively quiet until the events start in the start in the spring. One thing about COVID, it moved people outside to reduce the risk of them contacting the virus and that habit of being outside has to some extent continued. A lot of venues have spent money, and in some cases a lot of money, on outside marquees, almost like big tops, massive tents.

Researcher

The noise source that's complained about, is it predominantly the music or people voices post-COVID?

Interviewee (P1)

I would say the music because that's what travels the furthest the bass. People may be impacted by voice, you know, voices, etc., but... It doesn't tend to penetrate into buildings quite the same as, say, bass would.

Researcher

Do you and do you find pubs are quite compliant? Do you have any problems with pubs getting across the noise aspect to them?

Interviewee (P1)

It can be a struggle because they have to make money. Generally, through persistence they eventually toe the line. But you do have to go out at 11 o'clock at night and hear it and say, I was in the next-door street, I was in the complainant's bedroom. It wasn't acceptable. You wouldn't like it. So why should they have to suffer, you know? ... And of course, we've got the threat of a licence review or serving an abatement notice. Although it's taken, it was 18-months to get a court date up here, so an abatement notice isn't really the best. A licence review is quicker and a bit less formal, but it's again, it's in the hands of the council, as to what they do, you still need evidence to put a case forwards, but...I do quite like licence reviews, because win or lose, you've done your job, that's the point.

Researcher

Would you say, there've been more complaints since COVID, of noise?

Interviewee (P1)

I'd say marginally, yeah, I think so. I think a lot of it is because hospitality is struggling. They're trying to do everything to get people in... I think, the way in which the customers want to have a good time has changed. Partly because of COVID and I think it's just society,

really. There are fewer people going inside the pub to play darts and dominoes. More people wanted to be outside listening to music, DJ, that type of thing really. So, I would say with the trends more outdoor music, there has been more complaints. Understandably. It's just trying to get a steer as to where to set the balance.

Researcher

And you mentioned you predominantly use the licencing review. Do you still look at statutory nuisance or other legislation when you get complaint through?

Interviewee (P1)

Yeah, we do, because sometimes, if it's simply just too loud, but say it's not late but too loud, you could serve an abatement notice. Of course, that can be appealed. That's the only drawback, and we've got twenty-eight days to appeal, and then you got the rigmarole going to court. So it is a power we have. But at least the licence review, you get your evidence, licencing does the admin, put the review in place, you turn up, give your evidence and what will be will be.

Researcher

Do you consider antisocial behaviour, going down the route of warnings and notices?

Interviewee (P1)

Not really, no, because we have you have specific laws around noise, so we try and use the most appropriate legislation... If the ASB is actually outside the pub, then we might require door staff, but clearly they can't police the whole street. But we don't tend to use antisocial powers that we have.

Researcher

Do you find that COVID has impacted a need for legislation change or would you say it was in need maybe a bit of a change anyway?

Interviewee (P1)

I think the big problem is a Live Music Act, because obviously a lot of our licences have restrictions around what you could do outside and that's just blown it all away basically. The government has weakened the protections that people have... And it means we can't be proactive really and put things on the license to prevent disturbance, we have to do it all after the event and creates a lot more resource. So the government has made the job extremely difficult.

Researcher

You mentioned it being more seasonal with the noise. Have you found that has gotten earlier with more covered venues?

Interviewee (P1)

Yeah, it has extended the season, definitely. I feel that that's what pubs are trying to extend the outdoor season, really. So whereas might be May through to middle of September, you can add a month or two on to that really. The other big issue, of course, is the smoking ban. People have to go outside. One person goes outside to smoke, their mates come outside as well, before you know it, you got all the pub outside... Fewer people seem to go to night clubs either, for some reason. See where we are, they're not that busy. So obviously back in the day, back in the day, pubs are shut at 11. You have to go to a nightclub after that. But certainly in [redacted], the city, the town centre pubs have until three, maybe four even.

Researcher

So they've taken on a bit more of that kind of nightclub culture in a way?

Interviewee (P1)

Yeah, I'd say so, yeah. There's no need to go to a nightclub to keep drinking because chances are the pub you in will stay open till three, four, certainly in the centre of [redacted]. I mean, that's not as problematic as it sounds because it is the town centre, so, it's a hub of the nighttime economy. I think my bigger concern would be like a pub on an estate, where they might decide to stick a tent in the car park and have family fun days and all this sort of stuff. I think the biggest issue for me has been the Live Music Act really. Because whereas people in the past had to apply for TEN, now they don't. I think that's been the biggest negative around trying to control noise and protect the public.

Researcher

Well, they were bringing in a reform of the Licensing Act, they were they were looking to make some changes.

Interviewee (P1)

Yeah, there's all sorts of changes; they're all they're all there actually in favour the breweries and the pubs.

Researcher

I did notice that, yes. How do you think that would affect you then? Do you think you would make more challenging?

Interviewee (P1)

Not hugely. A lot of the changes, in my opinion, are just window dressing. There's not a huge amount of substance. I think it will allow more TENs, but we can still object if we have got decent grounds to object. I'm not overly concerned about these changes, but it's still the wrong direction of travel. It's like the planning changes, it's all taking away people's protections and rights and giving more power to big business.

Researcher

Do you think we need to be moving back towards focusing on people's rights then?

Interviewee (P1)

Yeah, I think it should be over balance, really. It's been steadily eroded over the past. When his live music had come in, at least 20 years ago... We can do things respectively. They will notice, like you know, licence review, but there just isn't the resource in local councils to do that, apart from maybe one or two pubs, if I'm perfectly honest. There's no point having a review, it's all got to be evidence based. Good evidence, several visits, and how many weekends can one obviously give up? So, yeah, so it's all moving in the wrong direction, but you find ways to move around it, working with the venues, trying to build that dialogue, giving advice.

Researcher

Do you get does it do you find it differs rural to urban? Do you get more complaints or different types music, that is an issue?

Interviewee (P1)

We, get complaints from all venues. In the smaller towns and villages, people are perhaps less reasonable because a lot of them have retired to the countryside or to a small village and they don't expect any noise... So it's challenging. There's a bit of a trend now for these

daytime discos.

Researcher

Have you had issues with these events more frequently?

Interviewee (P1)

They're normally done by 8 or 10 pm. We do try and work with them, but I'm not overly concerned. I mean, it gets the neighbours up in arms about it, but you know, it's not it's not like a pub that's having music every single weekend... Yeah, it's just trying to manage people's perceptions as well as what can be achieved.

Researcher

Do you find that's become more difficult? Is that people's expectations?

Interviewee (P1)

As how we operate in [redacted], we try and work with the business and work with the people to bring about a solution, then only go really formal if all of the avenues have failed.

9.10.2 Participant 2 (P2)

Date: 3 March 2026, 09:59am

Duration: Approx. 35 minutes

Researcher

So you still dealt with a lot of noise before, COVID. You mentioned on your questionnaire, you found that live music, external music, recorded or live were the most frequent noise complaints. Did you notice that before COVID as well?

Interviewee (P2)

I think that the difference possibly is maybe related to how pubs use external areas. So I think a lot of the cases I was dealing with pre-2015, the biggest impact actually was the smoking regulations. So what it did was moved a lot of customers from the inside to the outside. And as a result, you were getting doors being left open just so people get in and out. Which was then letting noise from music, etcetera, inside the pub out, and also that there tended to be then a little bit of push from the pubs to start having music outside to entertain their clients who were in external areas... But I think the other sort of longer-term consequence is that a lot of pubs have started to do more music in order to bring people in, because of the financial pressures which are related to the smoking ban, to COVID, to the financial situation, all those things which are causing pubs to close down. It's a bit of a cliché, but you're almost looking at either pubs turn themselves into a restaurant, or they turn themselves into a music venue. It seems a bit binary because they feel they need to do something different to survive... A lot of the issues have been about outside fun days. So occasional things where they'll put something on outside, they'll maybe get a couple of bands in or a DJ... but the way that we see them is that, because it's covered by the live music act. And you know how that took out all of the licencing conditions.

Researcher

Yes, because it meant they could have live music up until 11pm.

Interviewee (P2)

Yeah. Well, that's the thing is that originally it was live music was supposed to be like real people playing instruments, but it became recorded music as well. Because these days it's

very difficult to differentiate between live and recorded music. So it could be because if you look at a lot of the performers who do stuff in pubs, a lot of the tribute acts, they've got pre-recorded music and they sing along to it. So it's almost like a glorified karaoke. Is karaoke live music or recorded music? So, because of that, I think that they sort of gave up on it and just said, well, the Live Music Act also covers recorded music as well. So all of the conditions that there used to be on pubs, so with regard to noise insulation or noise limiting devices or keeping doors and windows closed, all those conditions that have been put on to licences very often at the request of environmental health were just wiped out. It removed that element of control. But with these outside ones, you know, if it's outside, there's just no noise insulation. Oh, and actually, and actually the other trend that has been, perhaps generated again by COVID because of the need for extra space and distancing is marquee type things. So, you see a lot of pubs now have a tent type of structure. So, which, again is sort of, you know, I was talking about smoking shelters. It's sort of kind of a development of that, where people aren't smoking in it... And it was originally it was to give more spacing for COVID, but now it's seen as an extra venue and you get things like maybe parties or wedding things in them and that sort of thing. And a tent just gives no noise attenuation at all. You might as well have it outside.

Researcher

Have you found the same people would complain kind of pre-COVID and post-COVID or have you noticed an increase?

Interviewee (P2)

I couldn't tell you that, but I know I've dealt with one or two people several times about the same sort of event from the same pub. And sometimes that's sometimes they're like village-y sort of environments as well. I've moved into this quiet area because I don't want any noise... There's this expectation from some people that if they live into move into a village, it's all going to be very quiet and whatever. But in the same way as like agriculture is noisy. Sometimes, if you live next door to a pub, you've got to expect a certain amount of disruption. It's inevitable. So, it does seem like very often it's certain individuals we have got, their expectations we can't meet.

Researcher

Do you think that COVID's had an impact on that? How people view noise from pubs or such events, do you think that impacted them?

Interviewee (P2)

Where I worked before, we had an airport. And, I left that place before COVID, but I do know that talking to colleagues there that during the period of COVID when there were a lot less flights... People started getting used to it and thinking that was the norm. But then it when it came back on they were shocked and started complaining because they'd got used to it being quieter. So, during that that COVID period, even though they tried to get people back into pubs probably a bit too soon, I think part of it was that sort of that thing of nothing happened that became the norm in people's minds, and when it restarted, even though it was possibly close to what it was before, it came as a bit of a shock to some people...it's also possible because pubs are closing down so much, all that custom is then concentrated into the pubs which are left. So, perhaps there's more activity at the ones which are left. Because you do get complaints about the customer noise as well, people leaving, people in the garden, you know loud voices, all those sort of things.... The other, actually, is these little bars that proliferating. So, what seems to happen is that because of that overheads of running

pubs. Lots of pubs have gone. But have a lot of them been replaced by what were shops or cafes... Then over time, the coffees sort of became a bit more and then you could then sort of do the odd bottle of beer and eventually it turns into a mini pub... What impact is that having on, you know, if they start having music because they can. What impact does that have? Because we always assume noise is going to be from like music and whatever, but very often it's from customers. The complaints come about customers, so, and that's been that has been a very post-COVID thing. And I think that is because of the financial pressures on pubs and it's a lot cheaper to run a small place. You just haven't got the overhead, you haven't got the heating, the maintenance, you know, all those sort of things because pubs tend to be big buildings.

Researcher

So when you get a noise complaint or, you know, in regard to a pub or, you know, a similar venue, do you look at the licencing first or do you go under any other legislation?

Interviewee (P2)

The deal that we have with our licencing team is that they will have a friendly word with the pub, and that works pretty well. Part of it as well is how the pubs communicate what they're doing with the neighbours... But actually quite often I have a village WhatsApp group or a Facebook page or that sort of thing, we'd encourage the pubs to put what they're going to do onto that sort of thing.

Researcher

And would you be investigating under the Environmental Protection Act or would you have gone for other legislation?

Interviewee (P2)

With pubs, with pubs, yes. Yeah, I think. You could use Community protection warnings, community protection notice, but I think I think the pub. There's not so much of the blurred line that you sometimes get with domestic noise. You should be able to make your mind up about whether it's nuisance or not. And then and then if we'd served a notice, and they were breaching it, then we would look for a licence review... 'cause if somebody's breaching a notice, then are they a fit and proper person to be running a pub?

Researcher

Do you think that that the current legislation is adequate to approach these sort of scenarios with pubs, you know, more post-COVID. I understand they're bringing in a licencing reform to looking to change some of the licensing.

Interviewee (P2)

So, I'm a I'm a great believer in making a judgement against the character of the area. That is one of the, you know, that's one of the well-established considerations in noise, in nuisance... And I think a lot of the issues have come in city centres where housing are the conversions or new housing developments and they've stuck them close to pubs and it's ended up with them pressure on the pub to change or even close down and I think that's wrong. I think that the and so I actually support that move because I think that they're talking about, they talk about in terms of agents of change.

9.10.3 Participant 3 (P3)

Date: 10 March 2026, 03:00pm

Duration: Approx. 40 minutes

Researcher

Have you noticed the type of noise, complaints that you've received, has that changed post-co, like in comparison to pre and post-COVID?

Interviewee (P3)

The difference, the main difference I noticed was that obviously during COVID with lockdowns and people got used to places being quiet. So whereas before you would probably get complaints just about music from pubs. People leaving late at night when they're drunk and making noise, then that's more of a licencing issue. What we found was because you had the quiet period in COVID where everything dipped down. What's happening is, and there's a whole psychological phenomena behind... But then, of course, when things started picking back up in COVID, whereas before people might have just complained about the noise from the music, whereas when it came back afterwards, people would be complaining about the music, the noise from the bin collections, the noise from people being outside. And actually, a lot of things that, because to do with nuisance, you've got the factor of age, character and locality. You know, if you live near a pub, you'd reasonably have to expect some pub noise. So if anything, find it more challenging managing people's expectations because they'd just forgotten that pubs are not naturally quiet. Pubs are pubs. And if you live near a pub, you've got to expect some noise. So yeah, if anything, after COVID... because things went so nice and quiet, afterwards, people were kind of expecting things to be as quiet again and we've had to just keep saying to people that applied with construction sites, pubs and everything. But we had to keep telling them, things are getting going, you've got to get used to the noise again. You know, our job is to deal with what is excessive and unreasonable. So yeah, it was a challenging conversations is the best way to put it.

Researcher

Did you find it changed the way that you had to approach noise complaints?

Interviewee (P3)

No, not really. I mean, in terms of the standard approach of basically getting people to... fill in diary sheets and create a record, you know, and then [redacted] fortunate that we, you know, there's not many authorities have a night time noise service and weekends, so that runs till 3am. So, you know, obviously we would say to people, call the service, get it witnessed... That carried on as normal, really, as before, but the main difference was having to explain to people when they were then calling the service about noise from people in the beer garden, for example. You know, just we had to then explain those things about just because people are sitting out there talking or they will be laughing and having a good time... It did mean when we were going to pubs, you know, we had to just start telling people, look, basically when you manage an expectations, you just have to be clear about what you can and can't do. So I'd say to them, look, if the music's too loud and the windows or doors are left open, I can deal with that. If you've got people in the garden who are drunk and laughing, I can't do anything about that. So it's quite simple really, you know... that's the main part of the job is managing what people expect.

Researcher

In regard to pubs, licenced premises, have you noticed a change in the type of premises? So whether it's to do with the licence of the premises, has there been a change in that since COVID?

Interviewee (P3)

Yes. Immediately after COVID, because obviously what you were allowed more of was outdoor. Getting together... I think I forget which tournament it was, but I think it might have even been the World Cup or the Euros, but as we were coming out of Covid, I had loads and loads of complaints about pubs having outdoor screens, and what they do is they'd link the footage up to the speakers, so basically it'd just be blasting for the whole game, you know, crowd noise and things like that. They'd even leave it running at half time with all the commentary it was really, really loud. So yeah, a lot of places went to doing things, outdoor entertainment, football, sports... There was more music outside with DJs.

Researcher

Did you find these, the pubs and the managers of pubs, were they quite cooperative in adapting or making changes pre, post-COVID?

Interviewee (P3)

I meant to mention was outdoor eating areas, because a lot of these popped up with pop-up tents and pop-up venues. So you'd suddenly get these big marquees appearing in beer gardens that weren't there before, just so people, because you could gather outdoors... they put the sides of the tent up. So suddenly you got from before, whereas you probably just get mostly before COVID, people would sit in the pub and eat, right. You'd get a few drinkers outside. During COVID, people got used to going outside and we had quite nice weather as well. So that even then when the restrictions started lessening, people still wanted to stay outside. That was the essential difference, so we had more of these outdoor eating areas. Loads of pop-up pizza things, street food and kiosks, just going round on a trailer and parking in pub car parks, which most of them weren't a problem. The ones that would be a problem were the ones that have got generators running... And so to come on to answer your second question, I think we found that it was definitely harder going out with licencing because of course, these businesses and places, I mean, some of them folded, well, a lot of them did, a lot of them closed. People were losing jobs, people were losing their businesses... And I remember going out with licencing and a lot of these people, they'd end up there in tears, you know, because it was like, all you can do there in our role is actually help these people to get their businesses going again, you know. So yeah, there was definitely a different approach to think about it. Before COVID, it was more clear cut, really. If you've got a noise problem, you go around and you tell somebody off and you tell them to turn it down or pack it in, you know. And if they didn't, they get a noise abatement notice, you know. Whereas during COVID, I think we had to, coming out of COVID, we had to find to be more flexible... our approach definitely changed, as in. Be more helpful and less enforcement led, you know, served very few noise abatement notices during COVID, actually. You know, it's kind of didn't want to, not didn't want to, but it wouldn't have really served the purpose, you know.

Researcher

Did you find that helped, that kind of change of approach? Did you still get good results in reducing any noise?

Interviewee (P3)

Mostly, I'd always say it's kind of 50-50 really... Although we did have to serve some noise abatement notices, it's not that we just stopped serving them, but it was just like the ones where we served them, we made sure they were far more deserving... Whereas I think definitely coming out of COVID, we just would be more flexible, not soft, but just flexible

Researcher

You mentioned in your questionnaire that the Environmental Protection Act is the legislation that you use the most when enforcing. What do you find makes it so effective in compared to other legislation?

Interviewee (P3)

Effective in as much the main thing with the EPA is that once you identify a statutory nuisance, local authorities are duty bound to serve a noise abatement notice. So it's clear cut really... the EPA is more reactive... Licencing legislation is much more preventative. So the kind of two work in tandem, you know, can't say one's better than the other. The licencing act is better at prevention. And there's also planning provisions. We started getting more planning applications during COVID for outdoor areas for nightclubs... It would be a case of it hasn't worked at the first two hurdles, it's then environmental health left picking up the pieces. And that's why it's a good thing there that the EPA is a pretty strong piece of reactive legislation, although it's reactive, I'd say it's a pretty strong piece of legislation... So there's a strong legal foundation, binding precedents, you know, for dealing with appeals and service of notice.

Researcher

They're looking at reforming the licensing, part of the licencing act in regard to giving more support to businesses. I don't know if you've seen or your thoughts are?

Interviewee (P3)

I think over time, people's expectations are definitely a lot different... there was that more kind of old school attitudes, like, well, you just have things are, you just, you know, you live with it, you put up with it. Whereas over time, what happens is places change and new people move into pubs... If they moved in during COVID, it was absolutely fatal, you could hear a pin drop. Of course, then the pub opens and they're like, you know, as well. And we had to kind of, without being rude, say to them, you do live next to a pub, you're going to have to...expect some noise... I know that part of it is to do with the internet, you know, and Facebook, because people can just look things up quicker. And, you know, if somebody's got a problem with a pub and the first thing that a lot of people do is they post it on Facebook and then these other people join in and start moaning. So going back to your question about the Licencing Act and the proposed changes are making it more difficult for people to complain. I think there's a good rationale behind that, because if anything...you know, I'm purely in the middle with its businesses and residents and it's about respect because it's respect for each other's rights, being neighbourly. I think possibly a lot of us have seen this is that there's a less neighbourliness... But less kind of give and take, really.

Researcher

Do you think that's just over time that's happened or do you think COVID's had an impact in that?

Interviewee (P3)

I think I think it was happening anyway, and I think what Covid did was speed it up. Yeah, it was happening anyway, and then COVID made it, made it more so.

Researcher

I don't know if there's anything you want to add or anything that comes to mind might be might be relevant.

Interviewee (P3)

One thing I would say is that I think sometimes officers and this isn't just the EHOs, it can be noise officers, who are, my perspective on it is slightly different because I used to be a DJ... I have found that it is a fact with some people who, you know, don't go to gigs and don't go to concerts. They'll have a very more clear-cut view of, no, you can't do that. I think however you, how you would ever bring that into training, training people to be more reasonable, is a tricky one, but I think there's...something to be said there, maybe it links more into balanced enforcement, consistency and balance and enforcement. I think there's councils don't always get it right there, you know, and that's not just with pubs and clubs... And a lot of officers when you first come in don't necessarily have experience for assessing statutory nuisance and what is really a nuisance. It's something that really comes with experience and building up over time. You know, it's not something obviously you can know straight away, and not sure we always get the best training. You know, for that it's like, right, go on a stat nuisance course, now you can serve noise abatement notice. There's a bit more to it than that.

Researcher

Do you think there needs to be more practical training then?

Interviewee (P3)

I would say that would only be a good thing in my view... it quite often just gets, it's an afterthought, it gets neglected, you know. You've got somebody who can turn up, they can do the day job, that's fine, get on with it. You know, you don't have to have refresher training for statutory nuisance every year or anything like that.