

# Noise nuisance



## Nuisance policy

We are committed to protecting the environment, and the health of our residents, from the effects of noise pollution. This booklet provides information about our policy on dealing with complaints of nuisance, and acts as a guide for those who have made, or are considering making, a complaint.

We believe that residents in the Rochford District area should have the following rights.

- To be able to sleep without disturbance during the times normally used for sleeping. However, light sleepers and those sensitive to noise will have to accept some disturbance.
- To have access to qualified staff, including out of normal working hours when arranged beforehand, to assess the nuisance.
- Not to regularly hear excessive noise from neighbours (for example, loud music, barking dogs, alarms, DIY)

This guide deals mainly with ways to control noise. However, we investigate complaints about other nuisances (for example, bonfire smoke, smells and so on) by following the same general procedures and principles.

## Statutory nuisance


From time to time, we are all exposed to noise from other people's activities. If this noise becomes too loud, lasts a long time or is at an unreasonable time of the day, we can assess whether or not the noise amounts to 'statutory nuisance' (that is, nuisance as defined by law) and decide what action we can take.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 (as amended by the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993 and the Noise Act 1996) gives us the power to investigate complaints of a nuisance, and to take action if we are satisfied that there is a statutory nuisance.

Nuisance, in terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, can be defined as:

'An unreasonable and significant emission of noise that causes significant and unreasonable interference with the use and enjoyment of your premises'.

It is much more than just being able to hear a noise, or something that is annoying or irritating.



Nuisance law is criminal law, and offenders could be fined and have any equipment making the noise taken away from them. So we must gather enough evidence to prove ‘beyond all reasonable doubt’ that there is a nuisance, and that the steps we have taken to stop the noise are reasonable.

This evidence may include evidence you provide, and it often takes time for us to gather and assess all the evidence we need.

In some cases, even if we prove that there is a statutory nuisance, the person responsible for the nuisance can make a ‘best practicable means’ defence.

This defence is only available to businesses, and only if they have taken all reasonable and appropriate measures to prevent the nuisance.

## **Making a complaint**

Before you make a complaint, we recommend that you try talking to the person causing the problem, in case they do not know that they are disturbing you. If this does not solve the problem, you can complain to us as follows.

### **During office hours**

You can make a complaint during normal office hours in the following ways.

By phone: 01702 318111

In person or in writing: The Council Offices  
South Street  
Rochford  
Essex  
SS4 1BW

By email: [epu@rochford.gov.uk](mailto:epu@rochford.gov.uk)

### **Out of office hours**

We do not currently offer an out-of-hours service for reporting a noise nuisance.

Your complaint must include the following details.

- Your name, address and phone number so we can keep you informed (we will not give these details to anyone else unless more formal action is necessary)
- The exact address (or site) the noise is coming from and the type of noise (for example, loud music, barking dogs)
- When the noise happens and how long it goes on
- The way the noise affects you (for example, stops you from sleeping)
- Where, when and in what circumstances you can hear the noise (for example, in the lounge over the sound of the TV)

- Any action you have taken to try to deal with the problem (for example, talking to the person causing the problem)

We will not reveal your name and address, but the person you have complained about may guess this. Also, your address may have to appear on a legal notice, or you may need to be a witness if the case goes to court. If your complaint does not include your name and address, we will give it a lower priority. And we will not investigate your complaint at all if we do not receive enough information.

## **Types of complaint and what we will do**

If you contact us by phone, the person you first make your complaint to will make a record of it and put you through to a member of our team. If nobody on our team is available at the time, we will contact you within three days.

The officer dealing with your complaint will tell you what action we will take. We will usually follow the procedure set out on the following pages.

### **Neighbour noise (general procedure)**

If we accept your complaint, we will send a letter to the person you have complained about. This will tell them that a complaint has been made, and ask them to consider ways to prevent their actions from being a nuisance.

At the same time we will send you a letter to confirm what we have done. We will also send you a set of diary sheets for you to fill in if the nuisance continues. You would need to fill these in for a period of 21 days to give us evidence of the alleged nuisance.

These diaries are very important and we may use them as evidence in court. Please be honest and accurate as magistrates do not look kindly on exaggerated or inaccurate evidence, and may throw the case out of court.

If the unreasonable noise happens during office hours, and an officer is available, they will visit you to assess the nuisance. We may arrange a visit for regular nuisances that arise out of office hours.

We may leave a locked recording device at your premises for a period. You would need to turn the device on when the noise happens.

We will usually make up to three visits at the time when the noise is most likely to happen.

### **Barking dogs**

We will follow the general procedure set out on the previous page. An officer will be willing to give advice to dog owners.

### **Noise from pubs, clubs, bars and restaurants**

You should complain to the Licensing Unit by phoning 01702 318058. You can also phone them for advice and information.

## **Noise from factories, building sites and public works (for example, roadworks)**

We will follow the general procedure set out on the previous page. However, you must accept that noise from building sites and public works is often short lived, and a defence of best practicable means could be put forward. In some cases we can take action, under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, to limit noise from building sites.

## **Noise from security alarms**

We have procedures in place with the police, magistrates' courts, locksmiths and alarm specialists to allow us to enter premises and vehicles to silence alarms. However, if we have given the person responsible for the alarm a notice for causing a statutory noise nuisance, we generally need to give them at least an hour's notice before we can arrange this action. This notice period may be extended if we need to get a warrant to enter premises.

## **Vehicles, machinery and equipment on the road (not including general traffic noise)**

We can take action to deal with noise from stationary generators and compressors. It may not be possible to silence some generators, particularly if they are temporary and needed for safety reasons (for example, at mobile traffic lights).

## **Action when the nuisance is not witnessed by an officer**

The officer that you are dealing with will tell you what action has been taken, and what further options are available to you.

You may need to take legal action yourself under section 82 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 or a similar law. Your diaries will be a valuable source of evidence for this action. Please see our leaflet 'Statutory nuisance – Taking your own private action'.

## **Action when the noise is witnessed by an officer**

The officer will make a judgement as to whether the noise amounts to a statutory nuisance. If appropriate, we will measure the volume of the sound.

If we are satisfied that the noise amounts to a statutory nuisance, we will issue an 'abatement notice' under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, we may first take informal action to try to solve the problem. We will explain to you what action we are taking.

It may be difficult to solve the problem to everyone's satisfaction. However, we will keep you informed of our progress.

## **Abatement notices**

Once an investigating officer has decided that there is a statutory nuisance, we may issue a formal abatement notice.

An abatement notice is a legal document that orders the person responsible to stop causing the nuisance. It may also contain conditions to make sure that a nuisance is not caused in the future.

## **Penalties**

Not keeping to the requirements of an abatement notice is a criminal offence and we can take 'works in default' (see page 10) to stop the nuisance. Offenders may be prosecuted in a magistrates' court, and they may have to pay a fine.

Offenders could be fined up to £5,000 for nuisances arising from a home and up to £20,000 for industrial or trade premises, plus any costs we are awarded.

## **Prosecution**

We will consider prosecuting people responsible for making a noise nuisance if we think they have broken the law. We will first get advice from our Legal Services section to assess whether the legal action is likely to be successful.

Any recommendation Legal Services make to start legal proceedings must be authorised by a relevant senior officer of the Environmental Protection Unit.

## **Works in default**

Works in default can be any reasonable action we take to make a person keep to an abatement notice, and this may include the following.

- Getting a warrant to enter premises and turn off an alarm (we may change the door locks afterwards)
- Getting a warrant to enter premises and remove the equipment that is causing the statutory noise nuisance
- Disconnecting car alarms

We may charge the person responsible for the nuisance our reasonable costs of taking necessary action.

## **Seizing (removing) equipment**

If the person responsible for causing a noise nuisance does not keep to their abatement notice, we can get a warrant to enter their premises and remove any equipment that is making the unreasonable noise.

Items we can remove include hi-fi equipment, musical instruments, CDs, tapes and so on.

If we prosecute the person responsible for the noise, we may get a 'forfeiture order'. This gives us the right to not return the items.

## **Complaints about our service**

If you are not happy with how we have dealt with your complaint you can discuss this with the Environmental Protection Manager or the Head of Environmental Services. They will review the case and send you a response.

## Compliments on our service

If you think that we have dealt with your complaint particularly well, let us know as it encourages us to provide a better service.

Other advice leaflets that you may find useful are listed below:

- Bonfires and smoke
- Dark smoke
- Light
- Odours
- Premises and vehicle alarms
- Statutory nuisance - taking your own private action
- Other sources of help and advice

You can view or download a copy of these leaflets from our website at [www.rochford.gov.uk/nuisance](http://www.rochford.gov.uk/nuisance)

### Rochford District Council

Council Offices, South Street, Rochford,  
Essex SS4 1BW

Phone: **01702 318111**

Email: **customerservices@rochford.gov.uk**

Website: **www.rochford.gov.uk/noise**

If you would like this information in  
large print, Braille or another  
language phone us on

**01702 318111**