









Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland

2017 - 2018

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Contents	Page
Introduction	3
Noise	3
Noise complaints	4
What can be done?	5
Key findings	6
Analysis by noise source	7
Analysis since 2003/04	8
Council initiatives to increase awareness and aid enforcement	9
Conclusion	9

Tables an	d Figures	Page
Table 1	Total noise complaints received by District Council 2017/18	11
Table 2	Notices served per 100 complaints received 2017/18	13
Figure 1	Noise complaints per 1000 head of population 2017/18	14
Figure 2	Total number of complaints 2004 - 2018	15
Figure 3	Noise complaints by category 2017/18	16
Figure 4	Noise complaints comparison by category 2004-2018	18
Figure 5	Industrial noise complaints comparison 2004 - 2018	19
Figure 6	Commercial & Leisure noise complaints comparison 2004 - 2018	20
Figure 7	Domestic noise complaints comparison 2004 - 2018	21
Figure 8	Transport noise complaints comparison 2004 - 2018	22
Figure 9	Construction noise complaints comparison 2004 - 2018	23
Figure 10	Noise in the street complaints comparison 2004 - 2018	24

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to inform central government, district councils, the general public and any other interested parties as to the number and nature of noise complaints received each year by district councils across Northern Ireland. The Regulatory and Natural Resources Policy Division of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has compiled this report from data supplied by district councils, the organisations that are legally empowered to deal with the vast majority of noise complaints.

This report analyses noise complaints received by all 11 councils between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. During this period 11,766 noise complaints were received in Northern Ireland. This is a 2.8% decrease in the total number of complaints received compared to the previous year. There has been a 7.2% increase in the number of notices served this year (607 served in 2017/18 and 566 served in 2016/17). There were two prosecutions for the 2017/18 year, compared to one prosecution in 2016/17 and 2015/16 and five in 2014/15.

The information in this report is an important indicator of the increasing public awareness of noise issues and the effectiveness of current noise controls. The statistics provided by district councils enable the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to target policy development, such as through the application of the powers in the Noise Act 1996 following the introduction of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 in April 2012.

This report also allows councils to compare their noise statistics to those of neighbouring districts, to examine trends and to consider initiatives implemented by other district councils that have proved effective in increasing noise awareness or reducing noise.

Noise

Noise is commonly defined as 'sound which is undesired by the recipient'. Noise can be any sound that is intrusive, disturbing or annoying. It can be one of the most pervasive pollutants and is capable of causing annoyance, stress, sleep disturbance and other serious conditions. The likelihood of individuals complaining to their council about noise depends on the degree of disturbance and the individual's awareness of the noise control service provided by the council.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that noise can seriously harm human health and interfere with people's daily activities at school, at work and during leisure time. Depending on the level of noise and its duration, the main health risks identified by the WHO include pain and hearing fatigue, impaired hearing, altered behaviour (such as aggression or feelings of helplessness), interference in speech and communication, sleep disturbance, cardiovascular effects, reduced academic and professional performance and altered hormonal responses (including increased stress hormone levels, altered metabolism and weakened immune system). A report published by the WHO and European Commission JRC in 2011¹ found that 1 in 3 individuals is annoyed during the daytime and 1 in 5 has experienced disturbed sleep at night because of traffic noise.

Given the potential adverse impacts on health, it is important that instances of noise pollution are taken seriously and fully addressed. The most common complaints relating to excessive noise suffered in Northern Ireland include lack of sleep, inability to relax and interruption to conversations or television programmes.

Burden of Disease from Environmental Noise – Quantification of healthy life years lost in Europe. World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe and European Commission JRC. 2011. Accessed 17 August 2011. Available at http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-publish/abstracts/burden-of-disease-from-environmental-noise.-quantification-of-healthy-life-years-lost-in-europe



What can be done?

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Articles 63 and 65 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (CNEA) give district councils the power to deal with noise from premises, including land, which they consider is prejudicial to health or amounts to a statutory nuisance. These powers apply not only to existing noise, but also where noise is expected to occur or reoccur. There is no fixed level of noise which constitutes a statutory nuisance. Individual circumstances differ and each case is judged on its merits. In deciding whether or not a noise is sufficient to amount to a statutory nuisance, the authorised officer of the district council has to consider the reaction of the average, reasonable person to the nuisance, taking account not only of its volume, but factors such as when and how often the noise occurs and the duration of the occurrence.

Where a council is satisfied that a nuisance exists, articles 63 and 65 require the district council to serve an Abatement Notice. The notice may require the noise to be stopped altogether or limited to certain times of the day. A notice must be served on the person responsible for the noise or if this person cannot be located, the owner or occupier of the premises. A person on whom an abatement notice is served has the right to appeal it within 21 days of being served.

The CNEA also introduced new powers for district councils to designate all or part of their district as an alarm notification area. In such areas the occupier or owner of any premises (residential or non-residential, occupied or vacant) that are fitted with an audible intruder alarm must nominate a key-holder for those premises and provide the district council with contact details. The key-holder is contacted by the council to silence an alarm that is sounding. Failure to nominate a key-holder is an offence and an individual found guilty is liable on summary conviction to a fine of £1000. Under this legislation, an authorised officer of a district council can enter premises (including land), without force, in order to silence an audible intruder alarm that:

- has been sounding continuously for more than twenty minutes or intermittently for more than
 hour;
- 2. is likely to give persons living or working in the vicinity reasonable cause for annoyance; and
- 3. if the premises are in an alarm notification area, reasonable steps have been taken to get the nominated key-holder to silence the alarm².

Once on the premises, an authorised officer can take whatever steps are necessary to silence the alarm³. This might include, for example, disabling the externally mounted alarm, but would not include picking a lock to enter. However, if requested by a district council, a lay magistrate can issue a warrant authorising the use of force by an authorised officer to enter premises where certain conditions are satisfied. Before issuing a warrant a lay magistrate must be satisfied that the conditions outlined above have been met, and that a district council cannot gain entry without the use of force⁴.

Article 56 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

³ Article 58 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Article 57 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Noise Act 1996

The Noise Act 1996 allows council officers to issue warning and fixed penalty notices and, in certain circumstances, to seize noise making equipment from premises emitting noise during night hours (from 11pm to 7am). These powers apply to premises including dwellings, those with an exhibition or entertainment licence, premises with a licence to sell intoxicating liquor (including an occasional licence) or where meals or refreshments are supplied for consumption on or off the premises, or premises occupied by a registered club.

Key findings

Complaints

- 11,766 noise complaints received in Northern Ireland in 2017/18.
- 2.8% decrease in the total number of complaints received compared to the previous year.

Figure 1 shows the number of complaints in each council area per 1000 people, based on mid 2017 population estimates. Noise complaints occur more often in urban areas where there are large numbers of people who may be bothered by the noise. As expected the greatest number of complaints occur in Belfast (19.9 complaints per 1000 people) and the fewest complaints per 1000 of population occur in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (2.5 per 1000 persons).

Notices

- 7.2% increase in the total number of notices served by district councils.
- A total of 607 notices were served in 2017/18. 80 notices were served under CNEA. Similar numbers of notices have been served under the CNEA over the last four years (67 in 2016/17, 65 in 2015/16, 67 in 2014/15, and 69 in 2013/14.

Details of noise notices served by district councils are contained in Table 2.

72 of the 80 notices served this year under the CNEA related to noise from domestic premises. 55 of these notices were served in response to loud music, televisions or parties and 15 were served in relation to animal noise. The high number of complaints relating to music/televisions/parties may be due to the time of day (evening/night) when individuals are most likely to be watching television loudly or having a party, coinciding with the period when unintended recipients are likely to be most offended by noise.

Table 2 illustrates the numbers of all notices served by district councils in Northern Ireland under the CNEA and the Noise Act 1996 per 100 complaints received. Councils serving the greatest number of notices per 100 complaints in 2017/18 were Belfast (8.5) and Ards and North Down (1.5).

Of the 11,766 complaints received, 5.2% (607 notices) resulted in notices being served and there were two prosecutions. This may indicate that council officers are very effective at resolving complaints informally without serving a notice, or that once the issue is drawn to the attention of the noise-maker, they rectify the problem quickly.



Analysis by noise source

Analysis of the data reveals that domestic noise accounted for 80.5% of all complaints this year, followed by complaints relating to commerce and leisure (8.2%), noise in the street (4.2%) and construction noise (2.8%). Figure 3 contains a breakdown of the figures but the tables below give a snapshot comparison of some of this year's statistics compared to last year's.

Domestic		
	2016/2017	2017/2018
Loud music, television and parties	43%	46%
Animal noise	38%	36%
Other neighbourhood noise	16%	15%

Noise in the Street			
	2016/2017	2017/2018	
Other	53%	40%	
Loudspeakers	4%	5%	
Antisocial behaviour	16%	14%	
Road Works	12%	20%	
Street performance/ public address	11%	15%	

Commercial and Leisure			
	2016/2017	2017/2018	
Entertainment	48%	44%	
premises			
Security alarms	21%	21%	
Other Shops and	10%	9%	
Offices			
Other	11%	12%	
Sport and leisure	7%	12%	

Transport			
	2016/2017	2017/2018	
Road vehicles	49%	42%	
Railways	5%	8%	
Delivery vehicles	13%	16%	
Vehicle horn/revving engine/exhausts	25%	24%	

Industrial			
	2016/2017	2017/2018	
Industry, manufacturing and workshops	57%	51%	
Agriculture	25%	22%	
Wind Turbine (Individual)	16%	20%	
Wind Farm	2%	7%	

The CNEA enables district councils to designate all or part of their district as an alarm notification area and enter premises with or without force to silence an alarm. No councils have designated alarm notification areas since this legislation came into operation. In 2017/18 Belfast City Council used the powers to silence alarms on nine occasions: eight without force and on one occasion with force pursuant to a Magistrate's warrant. Ards and North Down Borough Council used the powers to silence an alarm on one occasion without force.

Analysis since 2003/04

The total number of noise complaints in Northern Ireland in 2017/18 are 40% greater than the total number of noise complaints in Northern Ireland in 2003/04.

Noise complaints rose each year between 2003/04 and 2006/07 when they reached 11,923 complaints. Since 2006/07 the highest number of complaints received was for the 2011/12 year when they reached 12,193. The lowest number since 2006/07 was in 2015/16 when a dip to 10,754 occurred (figure 2).

Full details of the annual changes by sector are illustrated in Figure 4. This demonstrates that the proportion of noise complaints attributable to each category varies little year on year. Domestic noise complaints far outweigh all the other sources and, in general, since 2003/04 the commercial and leisure sector is the second largest category. Figures 5 to 10 show the changes in numbers of noise complaints across the various categories over the past 15 years.

Domestic				
2016/2017 2017/2018 % Change				
Number of	9,720	9,467	2.6%	
complaints			decrease	

Levels of domestic noise complaints increased notably between 2003/04 and 2006/07. In 2003/04 6879 complaints were received. This rose to 10393 in 2011/12 when complaints relating to domestic noise reached their peak.

Commercial and Leisure				
2016/2017 2017/2018 % Change				
Number of	945	970	2.6%	
complaints			increase	

Complaint numbers peaked in 2012/13 when 1124 were received.

Industrial				
2016/2017 2017/2018 % Change				
Number of complaints	281	282	0.4% increase	

Industrial noise complaints are now 50% greater than they were in 2003/04 when 187 were received.

Noise in the Street				
2016/2017 2017/2018 % Change				
Number of	538	495	8.0%	
complaints			decrease	

Complaints relating to noise in the street have decreased for the second successive year. In relation to 2003/04, complaints in this category are 156% greater for 2017/18.

Construction				
2016/2017 2017/2018 % Change				
Number of	380	328	13.7%	
complaints			decrease	

Construction noise complaints rose almost 86% between 2003/04 and 2007/08 and subsequently fell until 2010/2011, possibly due to the decline in construction and property development following the economic downturn. 2017/18 saw a 67% increase in construction/demolition noise complaints in comparison to 2010/2011 (Figure 9).

Transport			
	2016/2017	2017/2018	% Change
Number of	241	224	7.1%
complaints			decrease

Transport noise complaints make up only 1.9% of complaints this year and figures 3 and 8 provide a breakdown of the number of complaints by type of transport. Road vehicles are the predominant source of noise complaints in this category (42%). The number of complaints in relation to road noise has varied notably since 2003/04.

Council initiatives to increase awareness and aid enforcement

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council introduced a Noise App in 2016/17 which has continued to be used during 2017/18. Once downloaded to a smartphone, the App allows individuals affected by neighbour noise to record noise experienced and submit it to the Environmental Health Department of the Council. The App replaces traditional log sheets used to record complaints and gives officers an audio recording of incidents which enables officers to identify more serious incidents and provides an indication of intensity, loudness and duration. There are safeguards built into the App which enables verification of the recording authenticity and prevents misuse of the App. The App has resulted in noise complaints being investigated more quickly. In addition, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council launched a Green Dog Walkers scheme that included exhibitions and information sessions on learning behavioural techniques to help reduce dog barking.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council have been working with the PSNI to patrol student residential areas of the Borough. There were 24 planned patrols in 2017/18. Patrols focus on issues including antisocial behaviour, noise nuisance, drinking in public places and personal and property safety. This initiative also included attending student induction days with PSNI at University of Ulster Coleraine.

Conclusion

Neighbourhood noise problems can arise from many quarters. The lack of consideration for the rights of others is a contributory factor in many of these problems. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs considers that increasing education on noise prevention is one way of tackling the problem and is keen for the councils to continue their efforts to raise noise issues on local agendas.

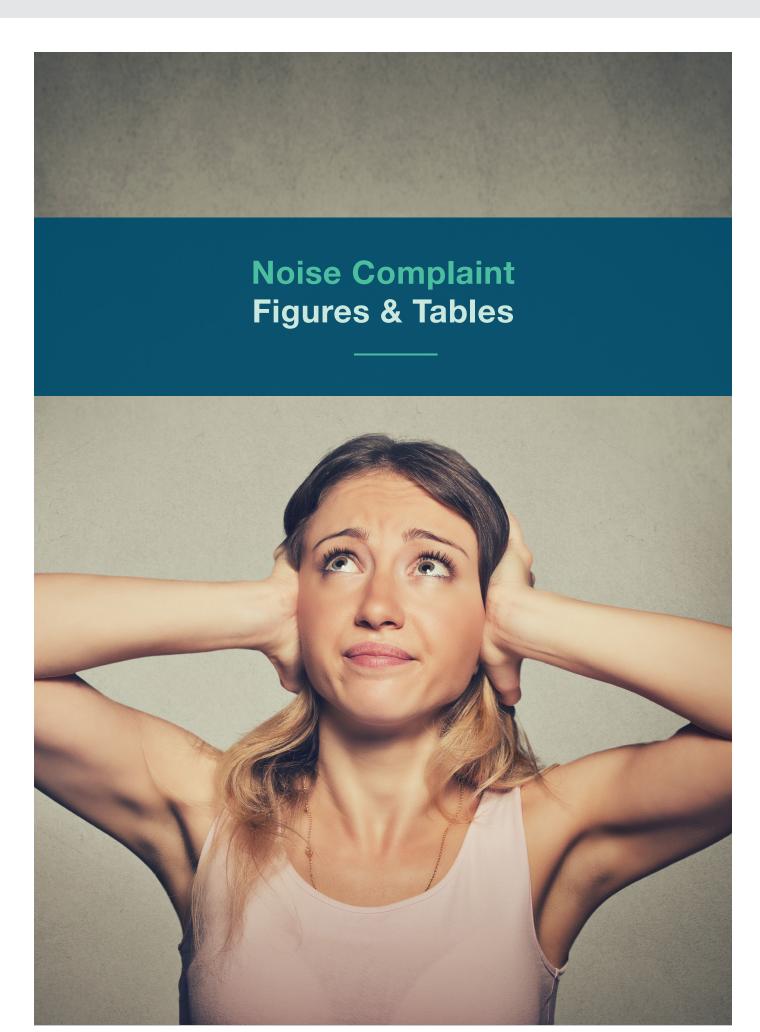


Table 1

Total noise complaints received by district council 2017-18

	Cate	Category of Source														
	ı	ndus	strial			Con	nmer	cial 8	k Leis	sure			Do	omest	ic	
COUNCIL	Industry Manufacturing Workshops	Agricultural	Wind Turbine (Individual)	Wind Farm	Entertainment Premises	Sports & Leisure	Petrol Stations/Car Wash	Hot Food Bars Restaurants	Other Shops & Offices	Security Alarms	Other	YIO	Music Televisions Parties	Animal Noise	House Alarms	Other Neighbour Noise
Antrim & Newtownabbey	22	2	6	2	3	10	0	0	3	4	34	8	119	289	7	87
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	9	11	12	0	1	25	1	2	0	2	4	7	143	409	6	52
Belfast	2	0	0	0	366	49	4	3	68	163	51	49	3,648	813	147	899
Causeway Coast & Glens	12	5	6	4	5	0	0	1	0	8	11	1	62	313	10	17
Derry & Strabane	18	2	2	2	26	3	0	6	1	3	5	4	77	239	11	52
Fermanagh & Omagh	8	7	7	2	5	1	2	0	3	4	3	1	41	120	0	51
Lisburn & Castlereagh	9	9	2	0	4	8	2	1	0	4	0	3	80	283	2	58
Mid & East Antrim	10	4	4	1	5	6	0	0	4	4	1	8	60	216	5	49
Mid Ulster	26	11	3	7	2	3	1	0	1	4	1	2	54	196	1	34
Newry, Mourne & Down	22	4	13	0	4	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	19	242	4	43
Ards & North Down	6	6	2	2	3	8	0	2	3	9	6	2	62	319	5	38
TOTAL	144	61	57	20	424	115	10	16	83	206	116	85	4,365	3,439	198	1,380
				282							970					9467

Table 1

Total noise complaints received by district council 2017-18 continued

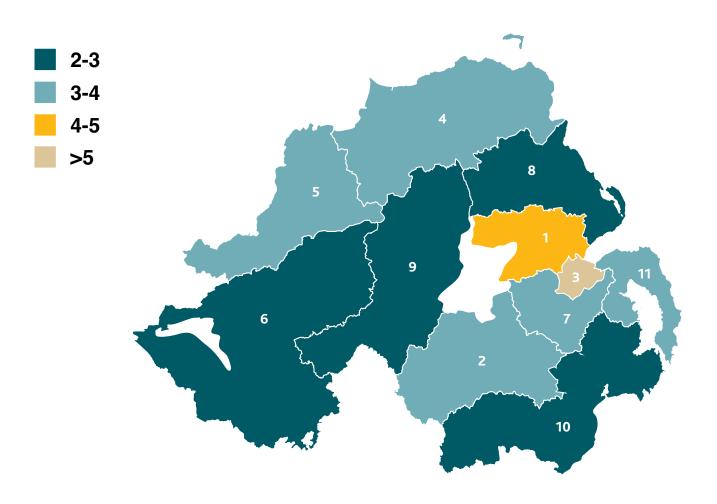
	Category of Source																
	Construction			Tra	nspo	ort				N	oise	in	the	Stre	et		
COUNCIL	Construction Sites/Demolition Works Road Works	Road Vehicles	Railways	Civil Aircraft	Military Aircraft	Delivery Vehicles	Vehicle Alarms	Vehicle horns/revving engines/noisy exhausts	Loudspeakers	Road Works	Ice Cream Van Chimes	Street Traders	Street Performance Public Address	Children Playing	Antisocial Behaviour	Other	Total
Antrim & Newtownabbey	30	3	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	3	4	644
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	23	10	0	0	0	3	0	10	0	0	4	0	1	2	20	7	764
Belfast	150	33	16	0	3	15	7	9	3	52	1	0	61	0	18	148	6,778
Causeway Coast & Glens	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	11	2	1	0	0	2	0	6	0	492
Derry & Strabane	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	6	9	35	2	0	0	1	6	16	532
Fermanagh & Omagh	19	4	0	0	0	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	3	297
Lisburn & Castlereagh	20	3	1	0	0	4	1	4	3	8	0	1	5	2	0	0	517
Mid & East Antrim	5	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	3	1	0	1	2	4	400
Mid Ulster	17	3	0	0	0	1	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	383
Newry, Mourne & Down	21	29	0	1	0	4	10	0	3	0	0	1	1	2	0	14	441
Ards & North Down	30	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	3	0	0	1	4	1	0	1	518
TOTAL	328	94	17	2		36	18	54	25	101	11	4	74	12	71	197	1,1766
	328							224								495	

Table 2

Notices served per 100 complaints received 2017-18

COUNCIL	Number notices served (CNEA & NA)	Number of notices per 100 complaints
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0	0.00
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	11	1.44
Belfast	576	8.50
Causeway Coast & Glens	3	0.61
Derry & Strabane	0	0.00
Fermanagh & Omagh	1	0.34
Lisburn & Castereagh	2	0.39
Mid & East Antrim	0	0.00
Mid Ulster	3	0.78
Newry, Mourne & Down	3	0.68
Ards & North Down	8	1.54
TOTAL	607	5.16

Noise complaints per 1000 head of population 2017-18



- 1 Antrim & Newtownabbey
- **2** Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon
- **3** Belfast
- 4 Causeway Coast & Glens
- 5 Derry & Strabane

- 6 Fermanagh & Omagh
- 7 Lisburn & Castlereagh
- 8 Mid & East Antrim
- 9 Mid Ulster
- 10 Newry, Mourne & Down
- 11 Ards & North Down

Figure 2

Total number of Complaints 2004 - 2018

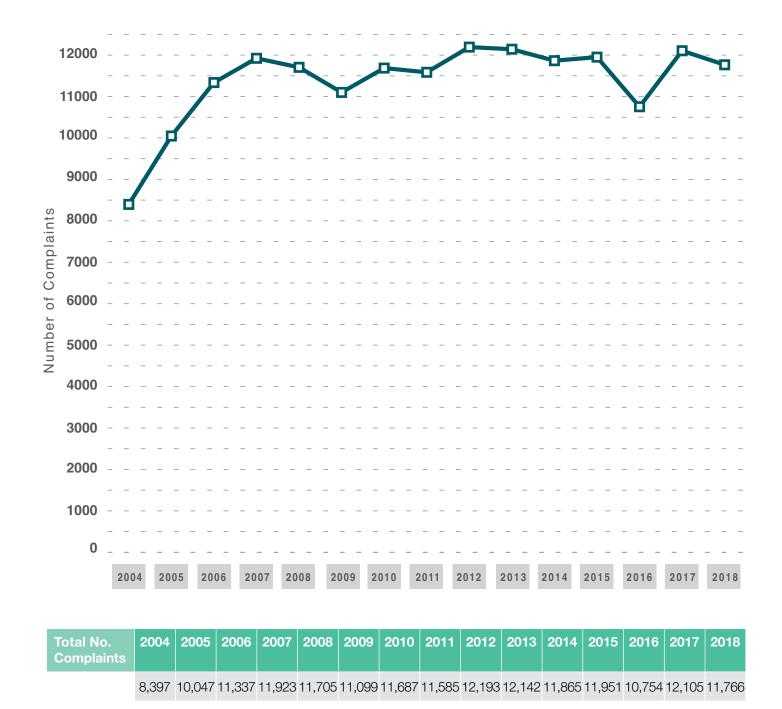
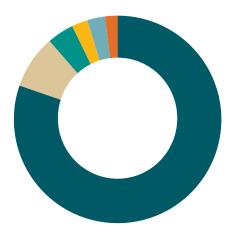


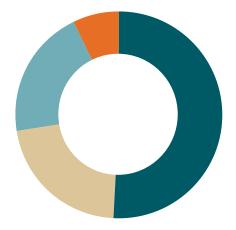
Figure 3

Noise complaints by category 2017-18



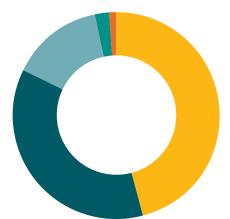
Total Noise Complaints

Domestic	80.46%
Commercial & Leisure	8.24%
Noise in Street	4.21%
Industrial	2.40%
Construction	2.79%
Transport	1.90%



Industrial Complaints

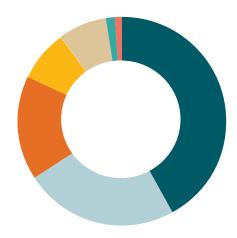
ndustry Manufacturing Workshops	51.06%
Agricultural	21.63%
Wind Turbine (Individual)	20.21%
Wind Farm	7.09%
	Workshops Agricultural Wind Turbine (Individual)



Domestic Complaints

Music Televisions Parties	46.11%
Animal Noise	36.3%
Other Neighbour Noise	14.58%
House Alarms	2.09%
DIY	0.90%

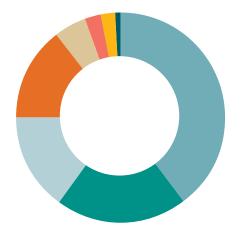
Transport Complaints



Road Vehicles	41.96%
Vehicle horns/revving engines/noisy exhaust	24.11%
Vehicle Alarms	16.07%
Delivery Vehicles	8.04%
Railways	7.59%
Military Aircraft	1.34%
Civil Aircraft	0.89%

Commercial and Leisure Complaints

Entertainment Premises	43.71%
Security Alarms	21.24%
Other	11.96%
Sports & Leisure	11.86%
Other Shops & Offices	8.56%
Hot Food Bars Restaurants	1.65%
Petrol Stations Car Wash	1.03%

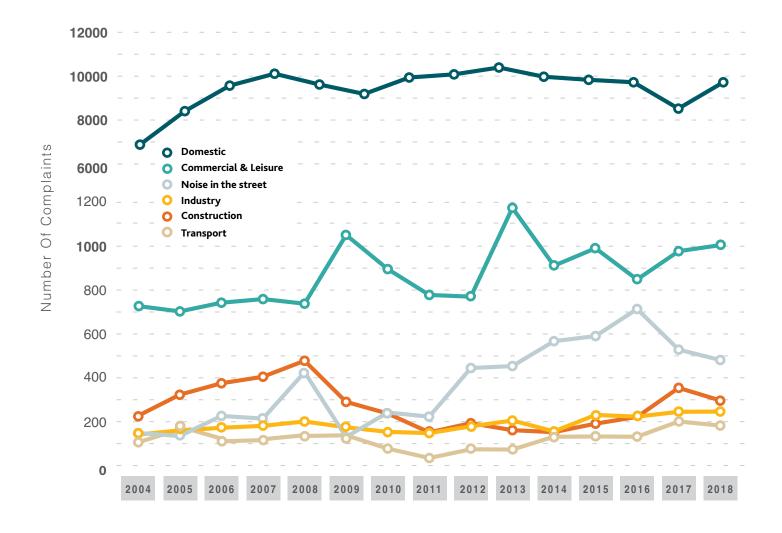


Noise in the Street Complaints

Other	39.80%
Road Works	20.40%
Street Performance Public Address	14.95%
Antisocial Behaviour	14.34%
Loudspeakers	5.05%
Children Playing	2.42%
Ice Cream Van Chimes	2.22%
Street Traders	0.81%

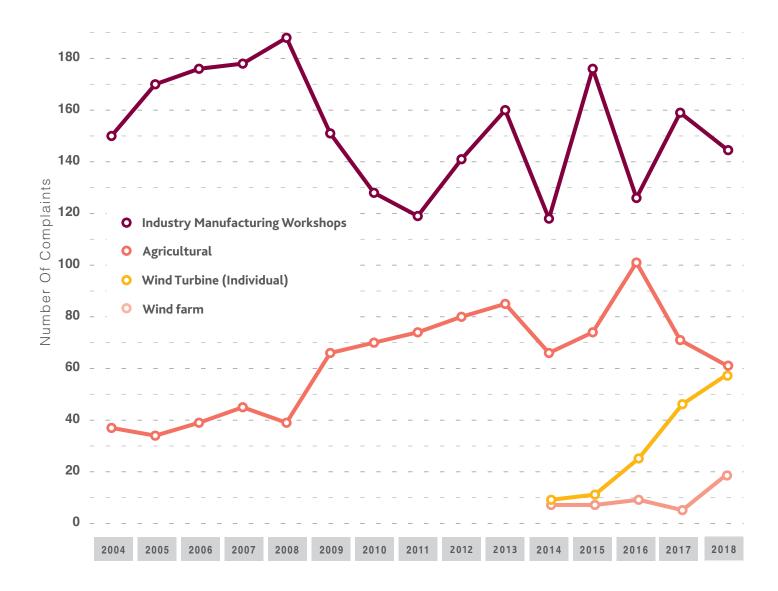
Figure 4

Total noise complaints comparison by category 2004-2018



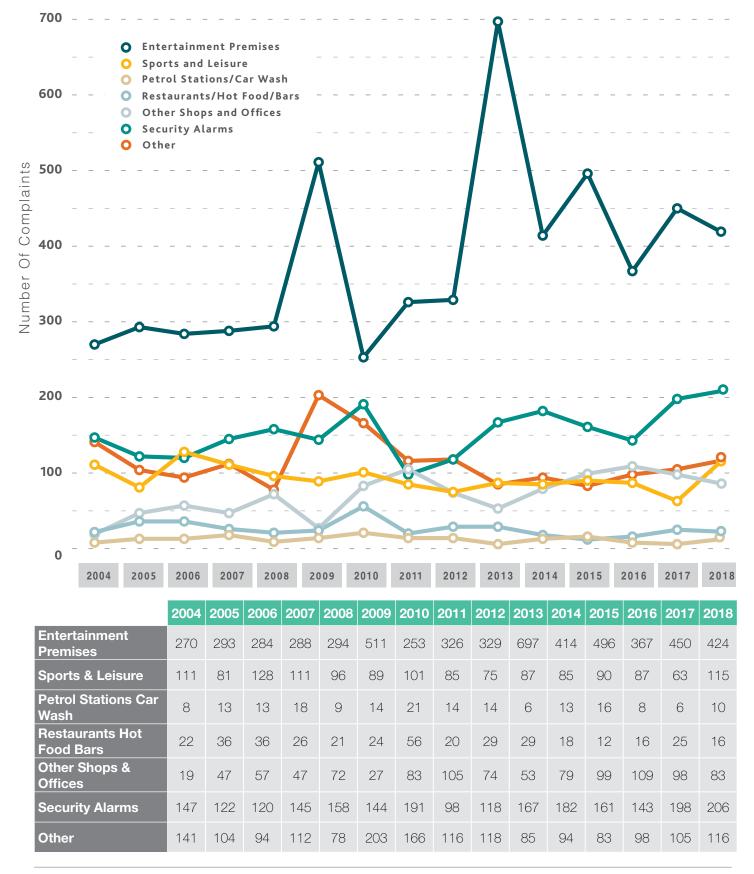
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Industry	187	204	215	223	241	217	198	193	221	245	200	268	261	281	282
Commercial & Leisure	718	696	732	747	728	1,012	871	764	757	1,124	885	957	828	945	970
Domestic	6,879	8,405	9,568	10,110	9,618	9,187	9,937	10,081	10,393	9,973	9,832	9,721	8,521	9,720	9,467
Construction	265	352	399	426	492	322	274	196	234	205	197	232	260	380	328
Transport	155	209	159	164	181	184	129	90	126	125	178	179	178	241	224
Noise in Street	193	181	264	253	445	177	278	261	462	470	573	594	706	538	495

Industrial noise complaints comparison 2004-2018



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Industry Manufacturing Workshops	150	170	176	178	188	151	128	119	141	160	118	176	126	159	144
Agricultural	37	34	39	45	39	66	70	74	80	85	66	74	101	71	61
Wind Turbine (Individual)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	11	25	46	57
Wind Farm	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7	9	5	20

Commercial and leisure noise complaints comparison 2004-2018



Domestic noise complaints comparison 2004-2018

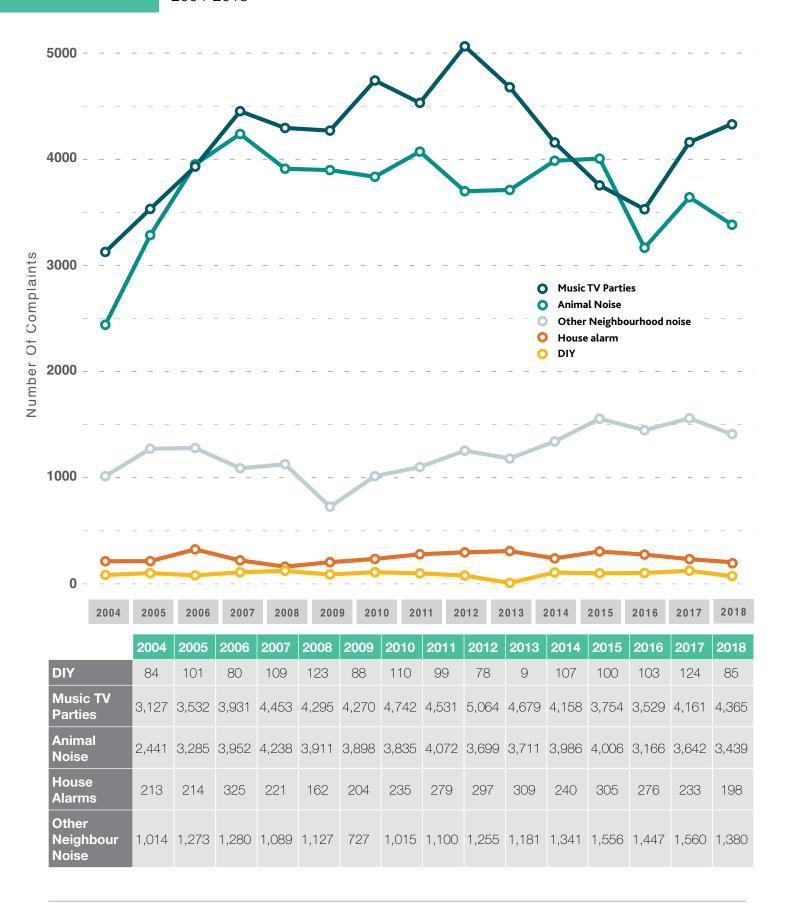
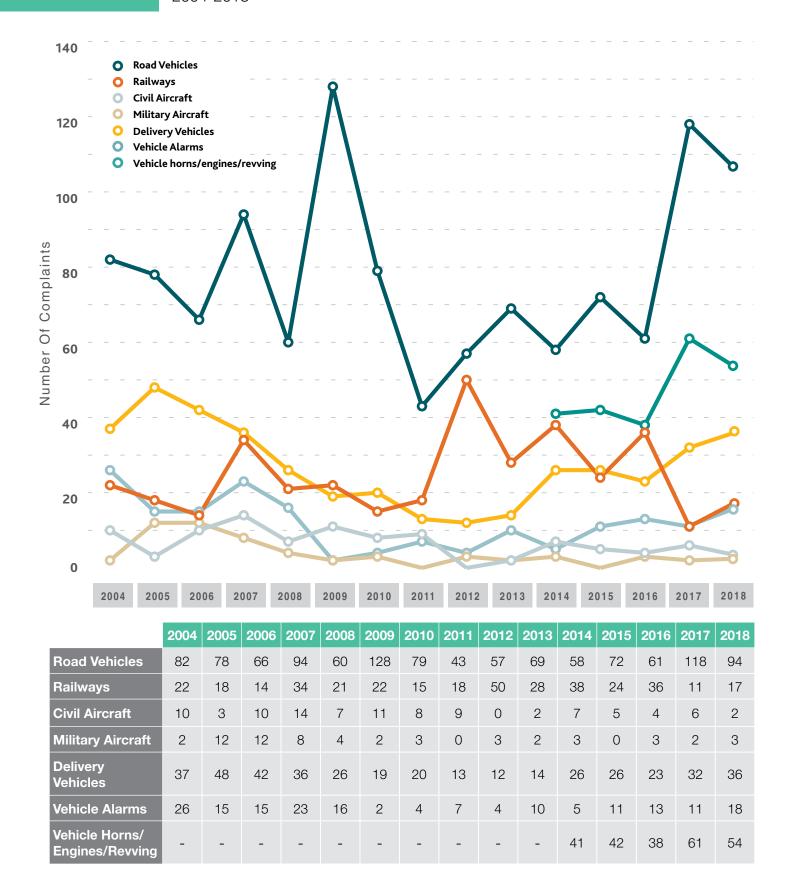
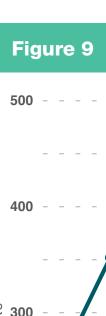


Figure 8

Transport noise complaints comparison 2004-2018



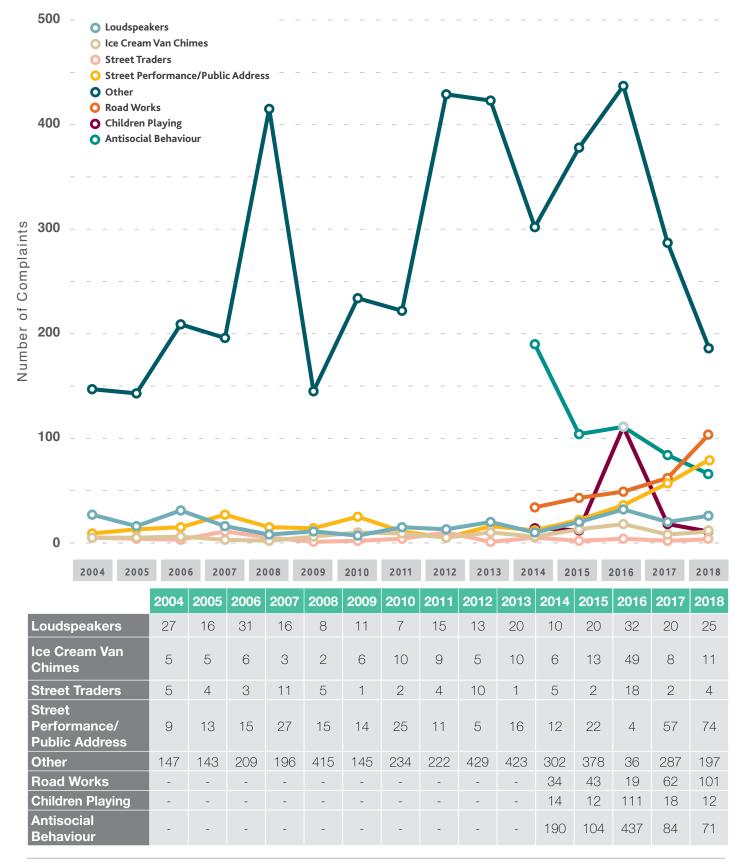


Construction noise complaints comparison 2004-2018



		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Constr	ruction	265	352	399	426	492	322	274	196	234	205	197	232	260	380	328

Noise in the street complaints comparison 2004-2018



Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland

2017 - 2018

Further information on noise matters in general, or the content of this report can be obtained from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs at the following address:

Air and Environmental Quality Unit

Regulatory and Natural Resources Policy Division
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
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