

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

6 JULY 2021

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor McGonigle to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Excessive Noise From Neighbours

Not a week goes by without a resident reporting a disturbance from a neighbour playing excessively loud music day and night.

I have suffered this myself and reported to environmental health. I filled in those diary sheets for over two years before the offending tenants were asked to leave.

This process is too long. The stress and misery of not being able to sleep, your children not sleeping, not being able to sit in your own garden and have friends and family round, is overwhelmingly unfair.

Asking to turn it down is often met with abuse and increased volume. The police will not always attend as it is not considered high priority.

There has to be more that can be done and within a shorter time-frame.

We are all entitled to some peace.

Can this matter be given some much needed attention?

REPLY by Councillor Davies:

I invite Councillor Barnett-Ward, the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities, to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities (Councillor Barnett-Ward):

The Environmental Protection & Nuisance (EPN) team is responsible for investigating complaints about alleged nuisance from both commercial and domestic sources. Other teams such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Team deal with Noise caused by Reading Borough Council Housing Tenants.

The team deal with approximately 1000 service requests a year related to noise nuisance alone. Officers resolve many of the nuisance issues reported to them, either by informal action or notices that are complied with. It can take some time to resolve complex or borderline cases, but two years is unusually long and most will be resolved more swiftly. Where cases do take a long time to resolve this is because of the statutory legal process that the council is obliged to follow.

The team will always try to resolve the problem informally in the first instance: giving the alleged perpetrator a chance to change their behaviour prior to more formal action being taken. This does extend the timescale of cases that progress to legal process, but an informal resolution makes it more likely that the neighbours will be able to get past the dispute and have an improved future relationship so it is always worth trying.

The EPN team sympathises with residents and recognises the impact that noisy neighbours can have on people's lives, but they also have to remain impartial and ensure that there

is strong evidence to justify enforcement action. This takes time to gather and requires continual input from the resident to achieve a successful outcome.

Investigating Domestic nuisance is complex as the noise is often sporadic and unpredictable. The team have introduced the noise app to make evidence gathering more efficient and reliable.

To take legal action, officers must prove that the noise meets the threshold of nuisance which is set out in legislation and case law. This means that they will not be able to take action to deal with noise that is causing an annoyance to neighbours if it does not reach the legal threshold.

The team is committed to using all powers available to resolve noise nuisance complaints, but it is not a simple and quick process if the alleged perpetrator does not co-operate or if the noise does not meet the legal definition of a noise nuisance. These are matters outwith the council's control.