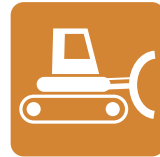




# NOISE

Complaint Statistics  
for Northern Ireland

2006 - 2007



Department of the  
**Environment**

[www.doeni.gov.uk](http://www.doeni.gov.uk)



# INTRODUCTION



The purpose of the report is to inform central government, local authorities, the general public and any other interested parties as to the extent of noise complaints received by district councils in Northern Ireland. The report has been compiled from a survey of district councils in Northern Ireland by the Planning and Environmental Policy Group, Department of the Environment. The main finding is that people are continuing to complain about noise in ever increasing numbers.

The commonly accepted definition of noise is 'sound which is undesired by the recipient'. In other words, noise can be any sound which is intrusive, disturbing or annoying.

In Northern Ireland, district councils are the organisations empowered to deal with the vast majority of noise pollution and this report provides an analysis of noise complaints received by all 26 councils during the period from 01 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

The Department regards the information derived from this report as an important indicator on the effectiveness of current controls on noise and the reporting of these statistics will enable Departmental officials to more appropriately target policy development and research needs in respect of environmental and neighbourhood noise. It will also provide an opportunity for councils to compare their noise statistics with those of neighbouring districts.



The extent to which people complain to councils about noise will not only depend on the degree of disturbance but also on awareness of council noise services and the level and type of service provided by individual councils. Surveys carried out in Northern Ireland and in other parts of the UK indicate that many people are unaware of who to contact if they have a problem with excessive noise disturbance and very few will actually complain directly to their local council.

Between 2005 and 2006 the Department conducted a number of short promotional campaigns to raise awareness of noise issues within the community. Leading with the message "Too Loud? – You're Allowed to Complain", television, press and poster adverts used a combination of striking imagery and annoying sounds to deliver a socially responsible message to a wide audience.

The main aim of the campaigns was to inform those people affected by noise that redress is available in the form of help from their local council. Noise makers were also reminded that "Too Loud is Not Allowed" and encouraged to adopt a more responsible attitude to potentially noisy activities such as playing music and keeping pets such as dogs.

The success of the 2006 campaign was measured by independent research which revealed that 90% of people who were exposed to the television adverts found these to be informative. There were also distinct changes in attitude to the issue of noise with 84% of people saying that the campaign made them think about the seriousness of the issue. Furthermore, 70% regarded noise as a serious issue, and almost half of those surveyed said they are likely to complain about noisy neighbours.

In May 2006, the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection (NSCA) reported that one in ten people in Britain said noise affected their quality of life and the same proportion was kept awake by excessive noise. Furthermore, NSCA reported that around half a million people had moved house in the previous year because of noise.

This research was published to mark 'Noise Action Week 2006', which was organised by NSCA and supported by the Department. This event was held from 22 to 26 May and provided everyone involved in managing noise an opportunity to raise awareness of the problems excessive noise can cause and the actions that can be taken to mitigate noise. Seven councils were



involved in events to mark Noise Action Week 2006 in Northern Ireland. Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Dungannon and Newry Councils co-ordinated a campaign to target landlords and letting agents with leaflets offering advice on neighbour noise issues. Ballymena Borough Council worked with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to target noise nuisance in its district, while in Carrickfergus, the Council targeted dog owners with a "Banish Barking" campaign.

The Environmental Noise Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 requires competent authorities to assess levels of environmental noise from major transport sources and in large urban areas. This process will be completed by the end of 2007 and will utilise detailed modelling to generate maps of environmental noise. In the future, action plans may be developed to manage noise exposure where it is deemed to be high and also to protect relatively quiet urban areas where they are identified.

In May 2006, the Department established a permanent noise monitoring station in Belfast, which will provide an ongoing indicator of ambient urban noise levels in the City. Measured noise levels from this site will also be used to quality assure the modelling process undertaken as part of the Regulations.



**TOO LOUD?**  
**You're *Allowed* to Complain**



Councils receive a wide variety of complaints about noise and for ease of reporting these have been categorised into the following main noise sources:

- Industrial
- Commercial and leisure
- Domestic
- Construction, demolition or road works
- Transport
- Noise in the street

These sources of noise have been further divided into sub-categories that represent the individual areas of most concern to those people that make complaints to their local council. Details of these sub-categories can be found in Table 1.

Noise complaint returns were provided by all of Northern Ireland's twenty-six district councils, which means this report provides a comprehensive picture of the noise environment for the entire region. In total 11,923 complaints were made to councils about noise in 2006/07.

A summary of all the data returned by the councils is contained in Tables 1 and 2. The information shows that major population centres generally have a higher number of noise complaints than more rural areas. So, in order to make a direct comparison between council areas the complaints should be considered in terms of the relevant population density. Figure 1 illustrates the numbers of noise complaints received by individual councils per 1,000 people in each district area, based on the 2001 census data. Councils receiving the highest level of noise complaint were Belfast, Carrickfergus and Coleraine.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT NOISE?



Article 38 of the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 gives district councils power to deal with noise from premises, including land, which they consider amounts to a statutory nuisance. These powers apply not only to the control of existing noise, but also where a noise is expected to occur or recur. Where a council is satisfied that a nuisance exists it is required to serve a legal notice requiring the abatement of that noise nuisance.

In total, council officers issued 94 noise abatement notices during 2006/07 under the Pollution Control and Local Government Order. Details of all noise notices served by district councils are contained in Table 2. It can be seen that the majority of these notices were issued in relation to noise emanating from domestic premises.

Councils also have discretion to adopt the Noise Act 1996, which provides additional powers to deal with noise at night from domestic premises. These powers include provision to issue warning notices, fixed penalty notices and in certain circumstances to seize noise making equipment. In Northern Ireland only Belfast City Council has adopted the Noise Act and during 2006/07 council officers issued 262 notices under this legislation (see Table 2).

Figure 2 illustrates the numbers of all noise notices served by district councils in Northern Ireland. For purposes of comparison these are expressed per 100 complaints received by the council. Overall it can be seen that relatively few noise notices are issued by district councils compared to the level of complaints received. Councils reporting the highest level of enforcement activity in 2006/07 were Belfast, Carrickfergus, Fermanagh and Newry and Mourne.

In dealing with complaints, council staff endeavour to seek co-operation and agreement to obtain a solution. Hence an informal approach is generally adopted initially to resolve noise complaints. Where this fails and evidence of a nuisance exists then more formal action is instigated. This includes the issue of verbal warnings and written warnings which will often be sufficient to ensure the desired outcome. If required a formal notice is issued, however, a frequent difficulty for councils is obtaining sufficient evidence to justify the issue of a noise notice.

Where notices are not complied with, councils may instigate legal proceedings for non-compliance. During 2006/07 there were a total of eight prosecutions taken in Northern Ireland by district councils for noise offences: Antrim (1), Armagh (3); Dungannon (1); Limavady (2); North Down (1).

# 06



Analysis of the data reveals that most complaints made to district councils are in the Domestic Sector. This category accounts for 85% of all complaints as illustrated by Figure 3.

Further analysis of this category is shown in Figure 4, which illustrates that the domestic noise source most complained about is music, television and parties. This is followed closely by noise from domestic animals, which is largely attributable to barking dogs.

Figure 4 also shows the breakdown of complaints in the other main categories, with the exception of the Construction Sector which has no further sub-divisions. This is however the third most complained about noise source with 426 complaints. In relation to the Commercial and Leisure Sector, the public appears to be most annoyed by entertainment noise, which accounts for almost 40% of all the noise complaints about commercial and leisure premises. These complaints will relate primarily to noise from amplified music and patrons. Also of prominence in this category are sporting events and commercial security alarms.

In the Transport Sector, noise from road traffic is the most dominant source of complaint with 48% of all transport related complaints. This is followed by complaints about noise from delivery vehicles and trains. Noise from car alarms accounted for 9% of complaints.



## TREND ANALYSIS



This is only the fourth year for which complete results are available but already an interesting picture of the noise environment in Northern Ireland is developing. In comparison to 2005/06, there were an additional 586 or just over 5% more noise complaints during 2006/07. Most of this increase occurred in the Domestic Sector. More significantly, Northern Ireland has experienced a 42% increase in complaints about noise over the last four years. Full details of these annual changes are illustrated in Figure 5. Domestic noise is clearly the source showing the greatest rise, with an increase of 47% in complaints about neighbour generated noise since 2003/04.

Upon closer inspection it can be seen that the increases in domestic complaints relate to all sources in that category, apart from house alarms and other noise which has shown a slight decrease in complaints over the last year. This is illustrated in Figure 6.

The most substantive increase relates to noise from music, television and parties, which is up by 13% over the last year and by 42% over the last three years. With 4,453 complaints, this is the most complained about domestic noise source. This dubious honour has traditionally been the preserve of noise from domestic pets, particularly barking dogs. In the last year however, complaints regarding this source have only increased by 7% compared to a rise of 20% in 2005/06. A slowdown in complaints about barking dogs may be attributable to the Department's publication of guidance on this problem in 2005, which offered advice to dog owners on how to improve their pets behaviour and reduce constant barking. Nevertheless complaints about animal noise have increased by a remarkable 74% overall since 2003/04.

Noise from entertainment premises continues to dominate the commercial category and accounted for 288 complaints to councils in 2006/07. This represents only a slight increase on the previous year, but it remains a consistent source of annoyance.

Commercial security alarms accounted for 145 complaints in the same category, which is a substantial increase of 21% on 2005/06, but which is similar to the level of complaint about this source during 2003/04. This is illustrated in Figure 9.



Complaints about noise from industry is only slightly up on last year but has exhibited a steady increase since 2003/04 by just over 19%. This is illustrated by Figure 8.

Also increasing steadily year on year are complaints about construction related noise. Councils report that these have gone up by a dramatic 60% in the last four years.

The major sources of noise within the Noise in the Street Sector (Figure 10) have been reported within the category entitled 'other'. Feedback from councils indicates that these generally relate to boisterous and anti-social behaviour occurring in the street. There has been a slight reduction in complaints about such activity over the last year. Overall, noise in the street has received fewer complaints than 2005/06, though complaints about noise from street traders and street performance / public address have increased on last year.

In the Transport Sector (Figure 7) complaints relating to transport have generally increased over the last four years, the most significant of which has been noise from delivery vehicles. Numbers of noise complaints about such vehicles have increased by 85% since 2003/04.

By contrast, councils are receiving fewer complaints about aircraft than in previous years, with only three for civil aircraft and two for military aircraft reported during 2006/07. This may well be due to the fact that aircraft noise is outside the scope of the legislation pertaining to noise nuisance currently available to councils and complaints being made direct to the relevant airports. There has also been a dramatic reduction in activity from military aircraft throughout Northern Ireland in recent years.

The percentage change in complaint numbers per district council is illustrated in Figure 11. The most significant increase in noise complaints over the last year has been experienced by Carrickfergus Borough Council with an increase of 52%. Other councils reporting significant increases in noise complaints are Dungannon, Larne and Magherafelt. The most significant reduction in noise complaints was reported by Limavady Borough Council which has received 38% fewer complaints during 2006/07 than in the previous year.

In respect of action against noise there has been a slight reduction in enforcement activity from councils with four fewer warning and abatement notices being served on noise offenders during 2006/07 compared to the year before. As illustrated in Table 2 this amounted



to 356 notices. Also illustrated are the numbers of prosecutions enacted by councils against noise offenders. In total eight cases were taken to court during 2006/07, which is the same number as for the previous year.

The continuing rise in the number of complaints demonstrates that noise is a problem that affects the quality of life of many people with increasing frequency. Our environment is undoubtedly becoming noisier and the problem of noise pollution and a desire to seek help in redressing its impact is certain to continue. Many neighbour noise problems in particular are a result of incompatible lifestyles in our modern world and a lack of consideration for the rights of others. The Department considers that better education is one way of tackling the problem, and is committed to increasing its efforts to highlight the seriousness of the issue and to better inform the public of how to gain help with noise problems.





**TABLE 1**  
**TOTAL NOISE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY**  
**DISTRICT COUNCIL**

COUNCIL	Industrial		Commercial & Leisure							Domestic		
	Industry Manufacturing Workshops	Agricultural	Entertainment Premises	Sports & Leisure	Petrol Stations Car Wash	Hot Food Bars Restaurants	Other Shops & Offices	Security Alarms	Other	DIY	Music/Televisions Parties	Animal Noise
Antrim	4	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	61	120
Ards	7	19	3	15	0	0	2	3	7	6	72	202
Armagh	3	1	4	2	2	1	3	0	0	0	46	149
Ballymena	3	6	1	6	0	1	1	1	0	3	73	130
Ballymoney	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	20	84
Banbridge	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	2	16	151
Belfast	6	0	195	28	0	6	25	109	57	47	2997	1084
Carrickfergus	2	0	3	14	1	1	0	5	0	3	38	144
Castlereagh	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	47	98
Coleraine	12	0	12	2	0	3	1	4	0	1	120	261
Cookstown	8	1	1	1	1	3	0	0	1	2	35	52
Craigavon	5	1	1	4	2	0	1	3	5	5	127	143
Derry	20	0	7	1	0	0	2	0	7	1	129	182
Down	8	1	23	7	4	3	4	2	7	2	68	118
Dungannon	14	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	20	80
Fermanagh	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	65	89
Larne	5	2	2	0	0	0	1	4	0	1	33	83
Limavady	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	3	1	30	48
Lisburn	7	6	13	10	1	2	1	7	6	7	127	212
Magherafelt	6	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	24	67
Moyle	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	4	2	7	37
Newry&Mourne	13	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	74	152
Newtownabbey	12	0	4	13	0	2	0	4	10	10	87	185
North Down	1	1	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	6	71	204
Omagh	32	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	37	78
Strabane	3	0	2	0	2	2	3	0	1	0	29	85
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>4453</b>	<b>4238</b>



Category of Source															TOTAL
		Construction	Transport						Noise in the Street						
House Alarms	Other Neighbour Noise	Construction Sites, Demolition Works, Road Works	Road Vehicles	Railways	Civil Aircraft	Military Aircraft	Delivery Vehicles	Vehicle Alarms	Loudspeakers	Ice Cream Van Chimes	Street Traders	Street Performance Public Address	Other		
1	10	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	209	
2	33	30	3	0	0	0	5	0	0	2	1	0	4	416	
0	6	8	9	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	235	
4	21	9	2	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	266	
0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	112	
0	6	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	184	
184	588	223	20	11	1	2	22	9	6	1	0	20	115	5756	
5	15	6	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	6	248	
3	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4	166	
0	35	26	5	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	19	507	
1	6	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	121	
0	17	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	324	
3	36	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	3	6	416	
0	43	9	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	4	306	
0	77	3	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	205	
0	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	171	
0	3	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	12	156	
0	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	96	
5	33	32	3	0	0	0	9	0	2	0	0	1	1	485	
0	14	2	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	124	
0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	56	
9	58	15	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	338	
2	38	15	9	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	8	401	
1	10	6	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	315	
1	12	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	172	
0	4	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	138	
<b>221</b>	<b>1089</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>11923</b>	

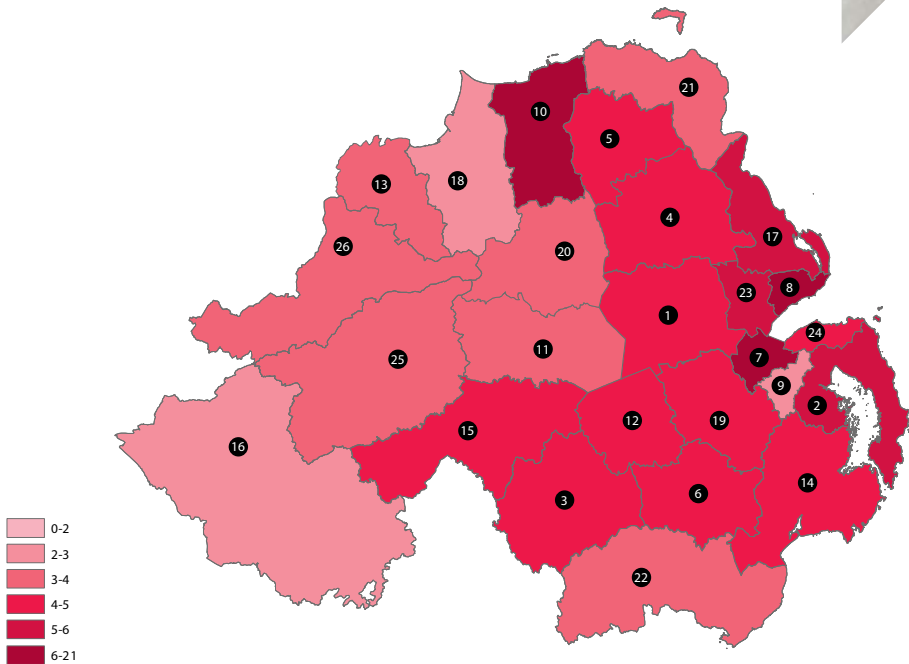


**TABLE 2**  
TOTAL NOTICES SERVED BY  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

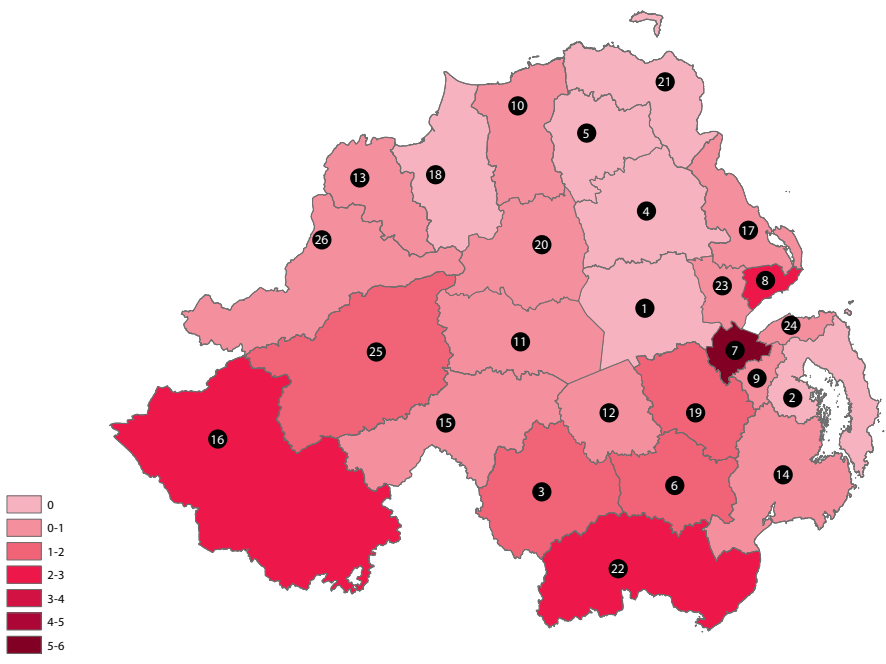
COUNCIL	Pollution Control & Local Government (NI) Order														Noise Act		TOTAL NOTICES	TOTAL PROSECUTIONS	Noise Act & PC & LG (NI) Order	
	Industrial		Commercial & Leisure							Domestic					Construction	Warning Notices				Fixed Penalty Notices
	Industry Manufacturing Workshops	Agricultural	Entertainment Premises	Sports & Leisure	Patrol Stations Car Wash	Hot Food Bars Restaurants	Other Shops & Offices	Security Alarms	Other	DIY	Music Televisions Parties	Animal Noise	House Alarms	Other Neighbour Noise	Construction Sites Demolition Works Road Works					
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	1	
Ards	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0	
Armagh	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	4	3	
Ballymena	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0	
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0	
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	0	
Belfast	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	6	6	25	0	1	256	6	307	0	
Carrickfergus	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	6	0	
Castlereagh	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0	
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	n/a	n/a	2	0	
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0	
Craigavon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	0	
Derry	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	3	0	
Down	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0	
Dungannon	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	1	
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	4	0	
Larne	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0	
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	2	
Lisburn	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	5	0	
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0	
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0	
Newry&Mourne	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	7	0	
Newtownabbey	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0	
North Down	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	3	1	
Omagh	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	2	0	
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	1	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>8</b>	



**FIGURE 1**  
NOISE COMPLAINTS PER  
1000 POPULATION



**FIGURE 2**  
NOTICES SERVED PER  
100 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

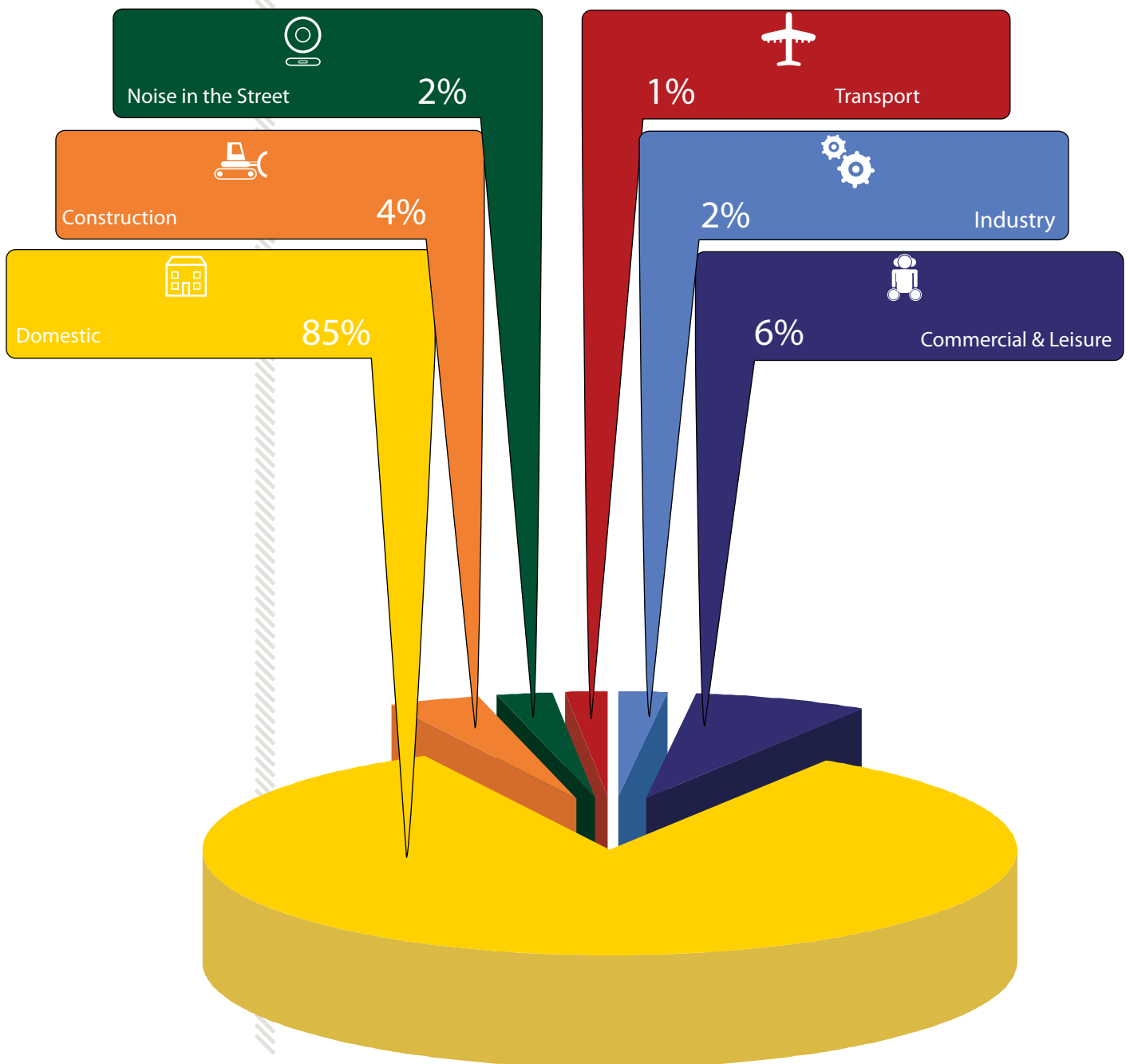


- 1 Antrim
- 2 Ards
- 3 Armagh City & District
- 4 Ballymena
- 5 Ballymoney
- 6 Banbridge
- 7 Belfast
- 8 Carrickfergus
- 9 Castlereagh
- 10 Coleraine
- 11 Cookstown
- 12 Craigavon
- 13 Derry
- 14 Down
- 15 Dungannon & South Tyrone
- 16 Fermanagh
- 17 Larne
- 18 Limavady
- 19 Lisburn
- 20 Magherafelt
- 21 Moyle
- 22 Newry & Mourne
- 23 Newtownabbey
- 24 North Down
- 25 Omagh
- 26 Strabane



FIGURE 3

TOTAL NOISE COMPLAINTS





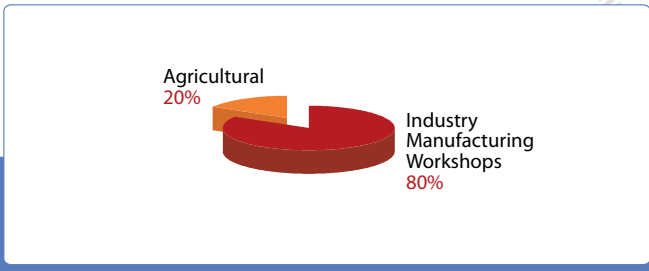


# FIGURE 4

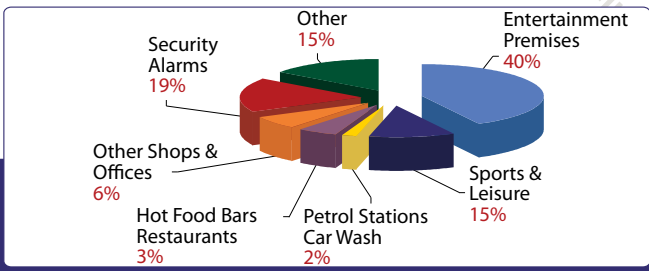
## NOISE COMPLAINT CATEGORIES



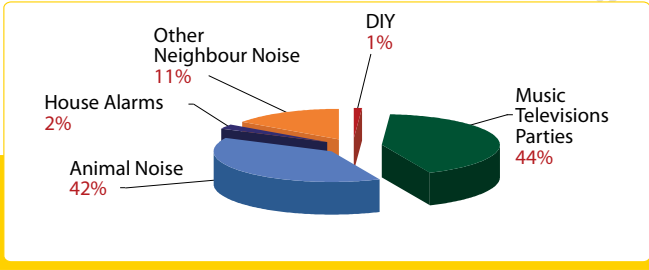
### Industry



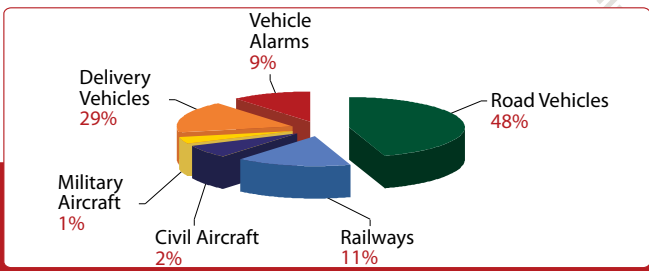
### Commercial & Leisure



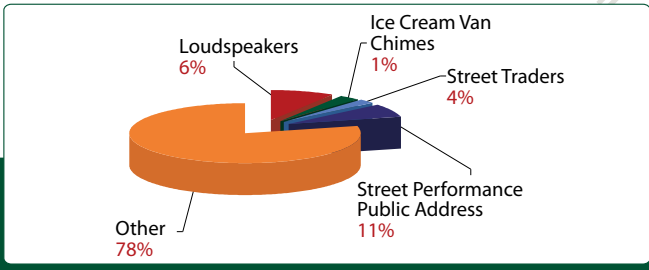
### Domestic



### Transport

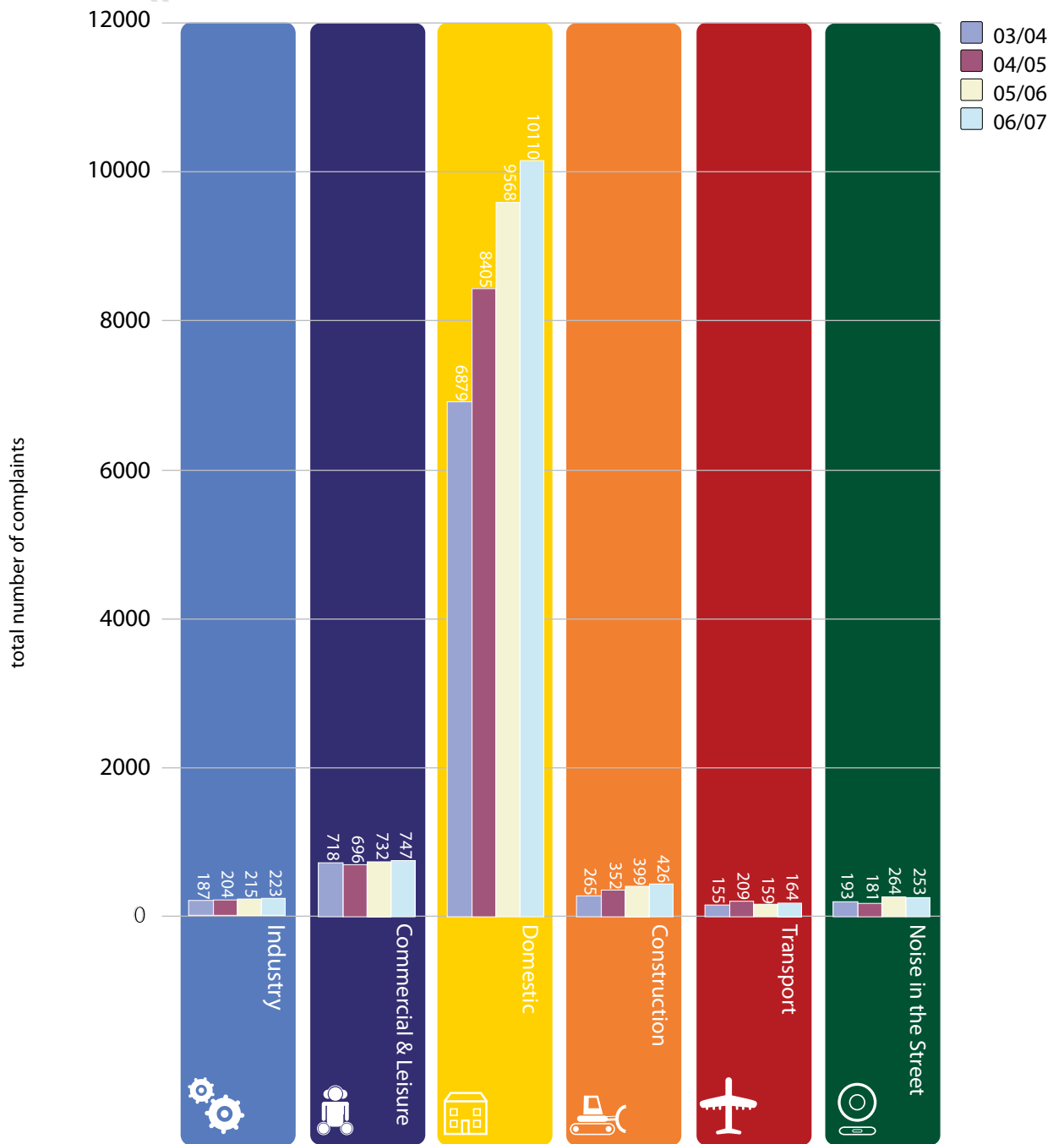


### Noise in the Street



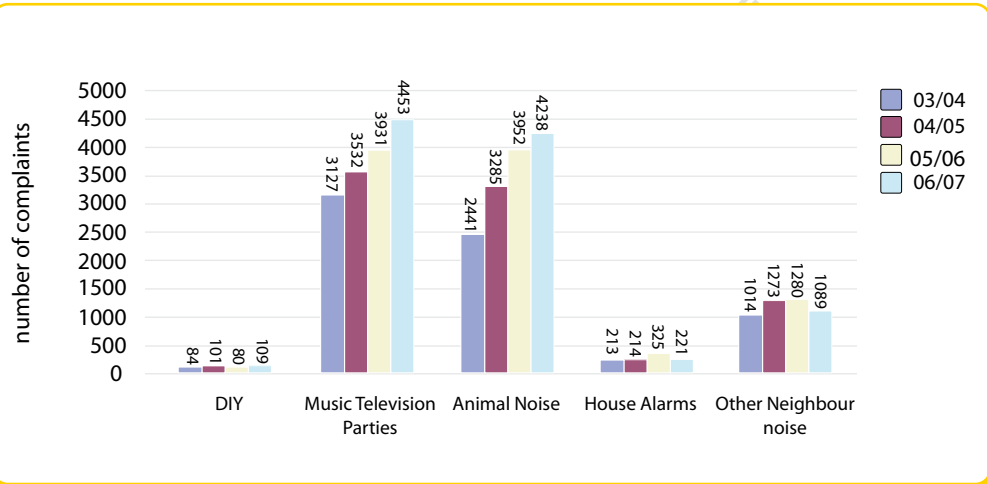


**FIGURE 5**  
**NOISE COMPLAINTS:**  
**2004 - 2007 COMPARISON**



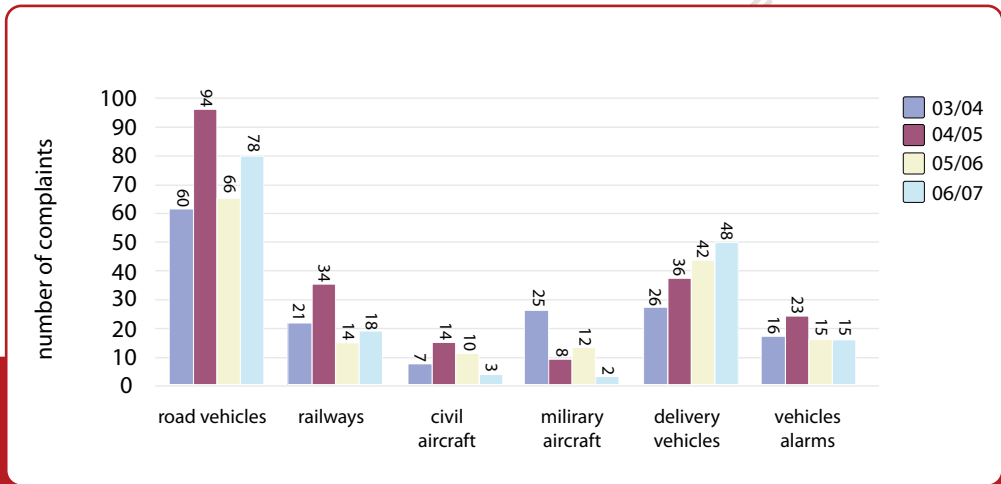


**FIGURE 6**  
DOMESTIC COMPLAINTS  
COMPARISONS 2004 - 2007



Domestic

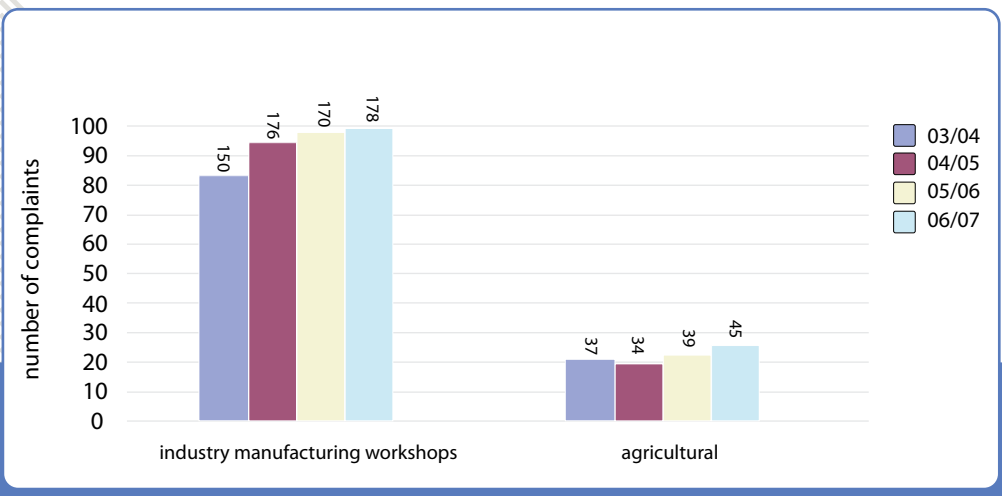
**FIGURE 7**  
TRANSPORT COMPLAINTS  
COMPARISONS 2004 - 2007



Transport

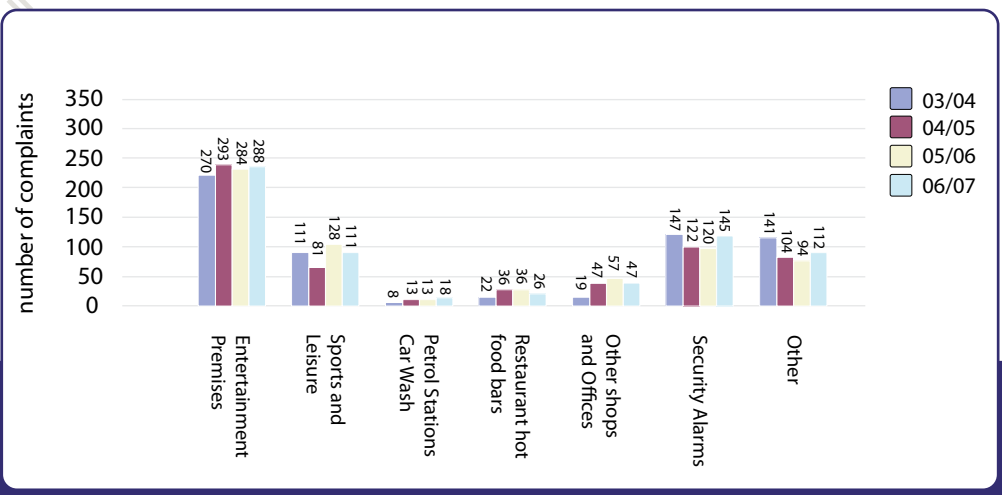


**FIGURE 8**  
INDUSTRIAL COMPLAINTS  
COMPARISONS 2004 - 2007



Industry

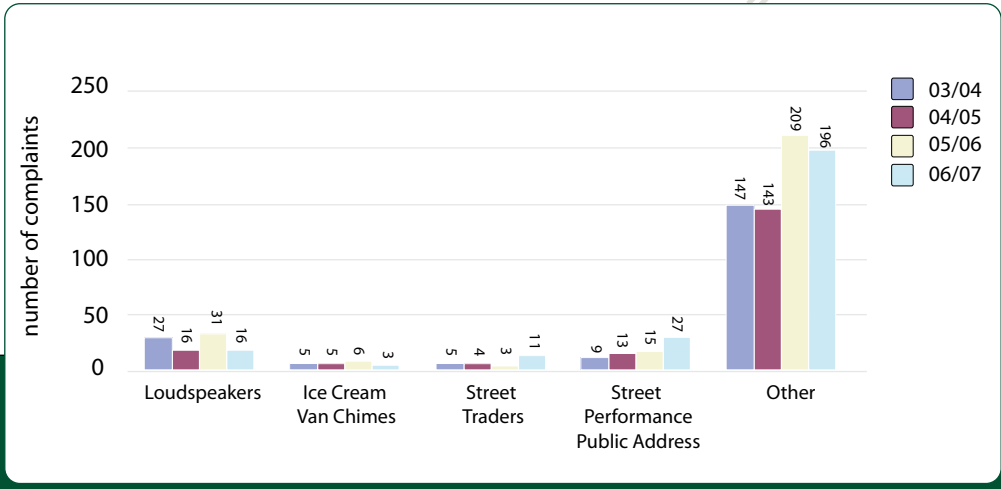
**FIGURE 9**  
COMMERCIAL AND LEISURE COMPLAINTS  
COMPARISONS 2004 - 2007




Commercial & Leisure



**FIGURE 10**  
NOISE IN THE STREET COMPLAINTS  
COMPARISONS 2004 - 2007



  
Noise in the Street

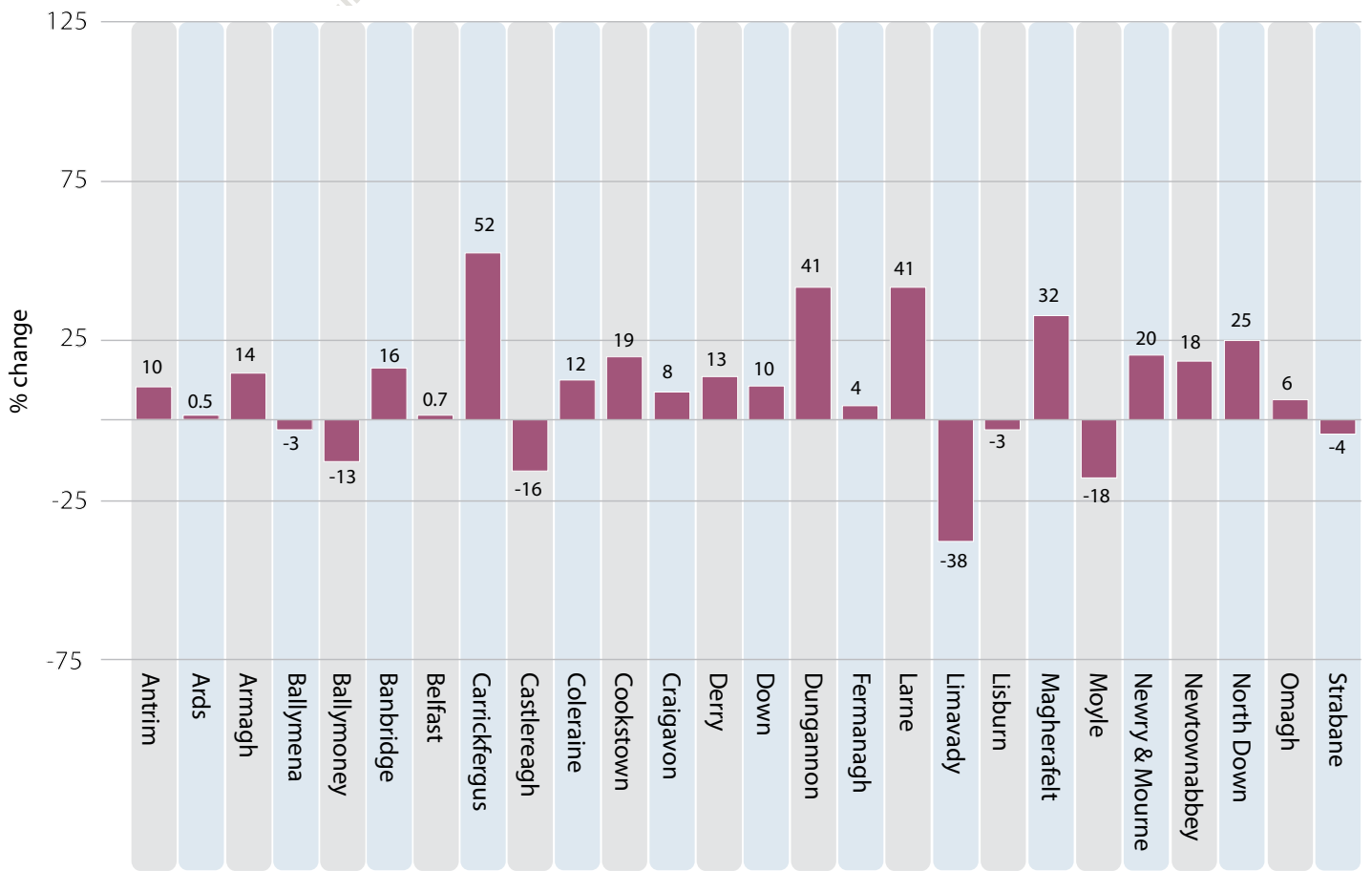
  
**TOO LOUD**  
Is **Not** Allowed



20



**FIGURE 11**  
**PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN COMPLAINT**  
**NUMBERS 2005/06 - 2006/07**







Department of the  
**Environment**

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*"The Department's aim is to secure a better and safer environment and support effective local government".*

Further information on noise matters in general, or the content of this report may be obtained from Department of the Environment, Planning and Environmental Policy Group at the following address:

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**ISBN 978-1-905127-67-2**