



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Robbie Moore MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577
E: correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk
W: gov.uk/defra

Baroness Brown of Cambridge
Chair, House of Lords Science and
Technology Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

17 April 2024

Dear Baroness Brown,

Thank you for your letter of 31 January to my colleague Rebecca Pow. I am responding as the minister now responsible for this area.

We are keenly aware of the importance of, and challenges associated with, reducing the disease burden attributable to noise and artificial light. I am pleased to report on some of the progress we are making against commitments in response to the Committee's findings; and on the actions we believe address the questions set out in your letter. You will appreciate that our commitments will be subject to available resources as a result of spending reviews, business planning, and balanced against other national priorities. I hope, however, that you will find this response encouraging.

I welcome the Committee's enthusiasm for the government's new noise modelling system, which we believe will be a game changer for policy and decision makers in the management of environmental noise. Quantifying the existing population exposure and calculating the associated disease burden are important first steps in the process of managing the health effects of noise, providing a clearer picture of where efforts need to be focused. As our response to the Committee's report set out, this tool will provide data which has never before been available to us, which will be invaluable to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) in its work to keep its burden of disease tools up to date. These tools, alongside our ongoing work with the Interdepartmental Group on Costs and Benefits (Noise Interest Group) (IGCB(N)), will inform development of policy options and scenarios for reducing the disease burden attributable to noise. They will also provide updated data relating to the social cost of noise to be considered in Government decision making.

In the government's response to your report, we also committed to convening a round table discussion to identify the most pressing evidence gaps with a view to prioritising our ongoing programme of research into the effects of noise. Work is under way to implement this action, and we will keep you updated. Until the data produced by our modelling system and the UKHSA's burden of disease work has been fully considered, it would not be appropriate to pre-empt the analysis with a commitment to setting targets at this point. The Noise Policy Statement for England sets out that the government's position on some of the issues with taking an approach based on objective noise-based measures. We are

determined to avoid the possibility of perverse outcomes and believe that a commitment to addressing evidence gaps and exploring the full range of options is the right course of action before committing to setting targets. This is intended to be the beginning, rather than the end, of a process; and we will, of course, continue our programme of research and policy development as resources allow.

In the meantime, many of the decisions affecting noise exposure levels across the country are devolved to a local level. As such it is fitting that we will be making the noise modelling system available to public bodies for scenario planning purposes as they work to meet their obligations under the Environmental Noise (England) Regulations 2006.

Since we submitted our response to your report we have also commenced work on three new research projects aimed at providing practical noise management tools – including one app-based tool – for local authorities and regulators implementing British Standards for noise. These focus on BS4142, for assessing industrial noise; and BS5228, the Code of Practice on Construction Noise.

With regard to light pollution, preparations are also under way for the round table event promised in our response to the Committee's report, and my officials are actively pursuing links with relevant officials in other European countries to learn about best practice where it exists.

UKHSA has initiated a working group under the auspices of the pre-existing Lighting Liaison Group which is considering what a UK Lighting Strategy might look like. The Lighting Liaison Group is exploring the possibility of accessible guidance for Local Authorities on light pollution, both for planners and for dealing with statutory nuisance provisions and best practice. UKHSA is represented on this subcommittee, which is open to specialists and expert representatives from other related Government departments.

Officials are also continuing to explore adding light to the remit of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE), as proposed in our response to your report.

You also asked about resources and guidance available for local authorities to tackle light and noise pollution.

In addition to the noise modelling system and the planned lighting guidance outlined above, Defra and UKHSA officials regularly contribute to the development of relevant British Standards, which provide authoritative and invaluable guidance to local authority decision makers. The Government's Public Health Outcomes Framework also provides relevant information on noise exposure for each local authority.

The government recognises that local authorities, as well as the wider planning sector, face serious capacity and capability challenges. To address this, we have developed a comprehensive Planning Capability and Capacity programme which provides the direct support that is needed now, delivers funding to local government, provides upskilling opportunities for existing planners, and further develops the future pipeline into the profession.

The final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024-25 makes available up to £64.7 billion, an increase in Core Spending Power of up to £4.5 billion or 7.5% in cash terms on 2023-24. This above-inflation increase demonstrates how the Government stands behind councils up and down the country.

The majority of the funding provided through the Local Government Finance Settlement is un-ringfenced. Councils are independent, democratic bodies who are best placed to understand what is needed to deliver local priorities and are accountable to local people.

I hope this information is helpful and reassures you that we are treating both noise and light pollution with due seriousness.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



ROBBIE MOORE MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs