

Control of Noise at Work

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1.0 Statement of purpose/objectives

This procedure will assist in meeting the Council's objective to care for staff and also to meet the legislative requirements of the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005.

2.0 Scope

This procedure applies to all Shropshire Council employees including part time, temporary staff and volunteers.

3.0 Assessment of noise exposure at the workplace

Shropshire Council has a duty to ensure that where there is a risk from exposure to loud noise, an assessment of the risk to the health and safety of employees is undertaken by a competent person. This assessment should include an assessment of the levels of noise to which workers are exposed, the assessment should be reviewed when it is no longer valid and a record of the risk assessment must be kept.

4.0 Elimination or control of noise exposure at the workplace

Shropshire Council has a duty to ensure that the risk from exposure to noise is either eliminated at source or, reduced to the lowest level reasonably practicable. The risk of exposure shall be reduced to as low as is reasonably practicable by establishing and implementing a programme of organisational and technical measures, excluding the provision of hearing protectors. Shropshire Council must ensure employees are not exposed above the exposure limit value (ELV) taking into account hearing protection; or if exceeded, reduce to below the ELV, identify the reason for exceeding and take measures to prevent a re-occurrence.

5.0 Hearing protection

Shropshire Council has a duty to make personal hearing protectors available upon request to any employee who is exposed to noise at or above the lower action value

(LAV). Shropshire Council has a duty to provide hearing protectors to any employee who is exposed to noise at or above the upper action value (UAV) and to designate the area as a mandatory hearing protection zone.

6.0 Maintenance and use of equipment

Shropshire Council has a duty to ensure that all noise-control equipment provided under the Regulations is fully and properly used (other than hearing protectors provided upon request at the LAV) and ensure all equipment is maintained in good repair. Employees must make full and proper use of hearing protectors and any other control measures provided under the Regulations, and report any defects discovered to the employer.

7.0 Health surveillance

Shropshire Council has a duty to ensure employees identified as being at risk from noise are placed under suitable health surveillance (which shall include testing of their hearing), and keep a suitable record of employees health surveillance. Employees must co-operate with any health surveillance programme implemented.

8.0 Information, instruction and training

Shropshire Council has a duty to provide adequate information, instruction and training to employees about the likely noise exposure and the risk to hearing, what is being done to control risks and exposures, how they can obtain hearing protection, how to report defects, what health surveillance will be provided and what symptoms of hearing loss to look for and how to report them.

9.0 Implementation

Management guidance in the form of Frequently Asked Questions will be provided and updated to support the implementation of the procedure.

10.0 Review of arrangement

This arrangement will be reviewed periodically by the Occupational Health and Safety Team in consultation with unions.

Approving Body

Health, Safety & Welfare Group

This review March 2021.

Noise Control Procedure

Frequently Asked Questions

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Appendix – Noise Questionnaire

1.0 Roles and Responsibilities/Who does what?

- 1.1 Shropshire Council as a local authority employer, through its elected members, has ultimate responsibility for compliance with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated legislation such as the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005.
- 1.2 The Chief Executive and Senior Management Team are responsible for ensuring:
 - The implementation of the Control of Noise at Work Arrangement across all areas to ensure consistency of approach.
 - The allocation of suitable and sufficient resources.
 - Ensuring that progress in the control and management of noise is monitored effectively.
- 1.3 Directors are responsible for ensuring:
 - The implementation of the Control of Noise Procedure and that all employees are familiar with the contents of the procedure insofar as it is relevant to their role and responsibilities.
 - That managers and supervisors receive sufficient training to undertake their role.
 - The allocation of sufficient resources to effectively manage noise.
- 1.4 Line Managers/Supervisors are responsible for:
 - Identifying employees who are exposed to noise at work.
 - Ensuring that all employees (including part time, temporary staff and volunteers) receive information, instruction and training on the management of noise.
 - Ensuring that any equipment used by employees is assessed and that information on appropriate work practices has been communicated to the employees.
 - Ensuring that appropriate work practices are observed by employees including safe working methods, use of appropriate hearing protectors, safe working within hearing protection zones, job rotation, appropriate breaks and adherence to the control measures resulting from the risk assessment.
 - Reporting any issues or unsafe conditions to the Occupational Health and Safety Team.
 - Ensuring that a proper assessment of work equipment is undertaken prior to purchase or hire.
- 1.5 The Occupational Health and Safety Team is responsible for:
 - Providing advice and guidance to managers on the effective control of noise in the workplace.
 - Liaising with the Occupational Health Service, and managers on the management of health surveillance programmes.
 - Ensuring, in conjunction with managers, the assessment and measurement of noise generated by work equipment and communication of the results to appropriate persons.
- 1.6 The Occupational Health Service is responsible for:
 - Arranging for appropriate health surveillance on employees exposed to

noise at work.

- Providing occupational medical advice and guidance on the effects and management of noise in the workplace.
- Organising specialist advice and examination where necessary for the purposes of managing noise in the workplace.

1.7 All employees of Shropshire Council are responsible for:

- Complying with the requirements of this procedure.
- Working safely and acting in accordance of training received.
- Ensuring, in conjunction with managers, the assessment and measurement of noise of work equipment and communicating the results to appropriate persons.

2.0 What will the Council do for staff working in a noisy environment?

The Council will take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that risk of hearing damage to employees who work with noisy equipment or in a noisy environment is reduced to a minimum.

In addition, the Council recognises that noise levels below those which cause hearing damage, in offices for example, can still cause problems such as disturbance, interference with communication and stress and will take reasonable steps to reduce noise levels as far as possible.

The Council will also take reasonable steps to minimise disturbance caused by noise from Council premises affecting people in the neighbourhood.

3.0 Where are noise risk assessments necessary?

Managers need to ensure that noise risk assessments and noise level surveys are carried out for the noisy areas, processes and equipment under their control, including those areas involved with the provision of music and entertainment. For example, if noise is intrusive (i.e. significantly louder than normal everyday life) but normal conversation is possible, and these conditions exist for longer than 6 hours per day, then an assessment survey will be needed. The assessment survey will be used as a basis for formulating action plans for remedial measures when necessary.

4.0 Who should carry out noise risk assessments?

Assessments must be carried out by a competent person who has successfully completed the Institute of Acoustics Certificate of Competence in Workplace Noise Risk Assessment course, or an equivalent qualification. Assessments should be carried out using suitable, calibrated noise level meters.

The Occupational Health and Safety Team can undertake such assessments. However, premise managers and supervisors can get a rough estimate of whether a noise risk assessment is necessary by completing the noise questionnaire in the appendix.

5.0 Should noise risk assessments be recorded and reviewed?

Noise risk assessments and surveys must be recorded, reviewed and updated regularly, particularly when changes in work practice and/or equipment cause changes in noise exposure levels of employees.

6.0 Should high noise exposure levels be reduced?

Yes, the council should take all steps to eliminate or control high noise exposure levels at source, or where this is not reasonably practicable, reduce noise exposure levels to as low a level as is reasonably practicable by implementing a programme of organisational and technical measures, excluding the provision of personal hearing protectors.

This may include use of reduced exposure time to ensure that the dose rate of 85 dB(A) for 8 hours (Upper Action Level) is not exceeded.

Personal hearing protectors should only be used while other methods of controlling noise exposures are sought, or as a last resort after technical and organisational methods have been tried and/or are not reasonably practicable.

7.0 Will hearing protectors be provided free of charge?

Shropshire Council will provide, free of charge, suitable and effective hearing protectors to employees working in high noise levels, as indicated to be necessary by the results of noise exposure assessment.

Shropshire Council will also provide for the maintenance and repair or renewal of the protective equipment and provide training in the selection and fitting of protectors and details of the circumstances in which they should be used.

8.0 What are hearing protection zones?

Hearing protection zones are parts of the workplace where the noise level is 85 dB(A) or above. Shropshire Council will designate and mark out hearing protection zones, which may include particular areas, operations or pieces of equipment. All personnel entering these zones will be required to wear hearing protectors inside the zone.

9.0 Will noise control equipment be maintained?

Shropshire Council will maintain all equipment and monitor all procedures introduced for the purpose of reducing noise exposure of employees, such as enclosures, silencers, machine covers etc. All personnel will be required to use these procedures and equipment correctly and promptly report any defects through the appropriate channels.

10.0 Will training be provided?

Shropshire Council will provide adequate information, instruction and training about the harmful effects of noise to all employees who are subject to high levels of noise and what they must do in order to protect themselves' and meet the requirements of the law and of the organisation's policy.

11.0 What happens if an employee raises a noise related issue?

Whenever an employee raises a matter related to noise in the workplace as a health and safety issue, area managers will:

- Take all necessary steps to investigate the circumstances.
- In addition, they will take corrective measures where appropriate.
- Advise employees of the actions taken.

Where a problem arises because of noise in the workplace, the employee must inform a responsible person immediately.

12.0 What is a safe system of work?

The harmful effects of noise at work may be minimised by the adoption of a safe system of work which, whilst accepting that the use of hearing protectors by employees may be the only practicable method of controlling noise exposure at present, requires a continuing effort to be made to search for and evaluate alternative methods, either by reducing noise levels or by reducing the time that employees are exposed to these levels. The three main features of such an arrangement are the need to continually assess, control, and protect.

13.0 What is the harm caused by excessive noise?

Working in high levels of noise without proper protection can cause irreversible damage to hearing. Even at lower levels noise can cause disturbance and stress.

14.0 How can these harmful effects be minimised?

The risk of incurring these harmful and disturbing effects of noise can be minimised by taking the following precautions:

- Avoid making unnecessary noise.
- Co-operate fully when any noise assessments are being carried out so that estimates of noise exposure levels are as accurate as possible.
- Correctly use all equipment and procedures designed to reduce noise exposure levels, e.g. noise enclosures, acoustic covers, silencers, etc.
- Do not interfere with or modify any such equipment without authorisation and co-operate to ensure that it is properly maintained.
- Always wear the ear protectors provided when required to do so, e.g. in designated and marked 'Ear Protection Zones'. Make sure that the ear protectors are always fitted correctly, are properly looked after and are worn for 100% of the time when exposed to loud noise.
- Promptly report all situations which may lead to increases in noise exposure levels, such as defects in equipment or changes in work routine.
- Participate fully in training sessions which detail the procedures to follow to avoid the harmful effects of noise. Inform the employer of any training needs in relation to noise at work.
- Advise management immediately of any problems caused by noise at work.

15.0 What records should be kept?

Records should be kept of the following:

- Noise exposure assessment reports. These should include details of workplaces, areas and jobs assessed and the results of the assessments, when the assessment took place, by whom it was carried out and the recommended action plan.
- Actions taken as a result of noise exposure assessments, with dates.
- Changes in work practices which affect noise exposure levels. e.g. changes to working hours, introduction of new machines, layout of machinery, introduction of noise reduction measures, etc.
- The provision of training in hearing conservation and noise control.
- The supply of personal ear protection (ear muffs and plugs) and details of its maintenance and replacement.
- Complaints by employees about the effects of noise.
- Action taken in respect of such complaints.
- The results of any health surveillance on employees carried out by company medical staff or carried out on behalf of the Council.
- It is recommended that assessment reports are kept for at least 40 years.

16.0 What are the employer's statutory duties?

Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act requires employers to provide a safe working environment.

More specific duties are imposed on the employer by the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, which define certain action levels and limit values based on personal daily ($L_{EP,d}$) or weekly ($L_{EP,w}$) noise exposure levels of employees.

17.0 What are exposure action levels and limit values?

The exposure action values are the levels of exposure to noise at which Shropshire Council is required to take certain actions. There are two exposure action values, the lower action value 80 dB(A) and the upper action value 85 dB(A). There is also an exposure limit value 87 dB(A).

The lower exposure action value is a daily or weekly average noise exposure level of 80 dB(A), at which Shropshire Council must ensure that a noise risk assessment has been carried out by a competent person. In addition, Shropshire Council must provide information and training. Finally hearing protection must be provided if employees request it.

The upper exposure action value is set at a daily or weekly average noise exposure of 85 dB(A). If there is exposure at or above this action value, the employer is required to do all that is required at 80 dB(A). In addition, the employer must take reasonably practicable measures to reduce noise exposure, such as engineering controls or other technical measures. The use of hearing protection is mandatory now if the noise cannot be controlled by these measures. At or above this value health surveillance must be provided.

Finally, there is an exposure limit value of 87 dB(A), above which no worker must be exposed (taking hearing protection into account).

The regulations also identify lower and upper peak action values, 135 dB(C) and 137 dB(C), and a peak limit value 140 dB(C). These peak values are typically only relevant for sudden impact noises.

18.0 Can exposure levels be averaged over more than an 8-hour day?

The regulations allow Shropshire Council to calculate noise exposures over a week rather than over a day but only in circumstances where noise exposure varies markedly from day to day. It is only likely to be appropriate where daily noise exposure on one or two working days in a week is at least 5 dB(A) higher than the other days, or the working week comprises three or fewer days of exposure.

When considering whether to use weekly averaging it is important to ensure there is no increase in risk to health. It would not, for example, be acceptable to expose workers to very high noise levels on a single day without providing them with hearing protection. There is an overriding requirement to reduce risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

As a rule, if a person needs to shout to be understood 2 metres away then the noise level is likely to be at or above 85 dB(A) the upper exposure action value.

19.0 What should be in a noise risk assessment?

Shropshire Council will ensure that a noise risk assessment has been carried out if any employee is likely to be exposed to noise at or above the lower exposure action value of 80 dB(A). A noise risk assessment has to be suitable and sufficient, that is it must:

- Have been drawn up by someone who is competent to carry out the task;
- Be based on advice and information from competent sources;
- Identify where there may be a risk from noise and who is likely to be affected;
- Contain a reliable estimate of employees' noise exposures and a comparison of exposure with the exposure action values and limit values;
- Identify the measures necessary to eliminate risks and exposures or reduce them to as low a level as is reasonably practicable, control exposures and protect employees;
- Identify those employees who need to be provided with health surveillance and whether any employees are at particular risk;
- Make and maintain a record of the assessment and action plan for improvement;
- Be reviewed as things change, for example changes in work practices, noise exposures and new ways of reducing risks.

20.0 How should Shropshire Council control noise in the workplace?

The Council is required under the regulations to:

- Take action to eliminate risks from noise exposure completely wherever it is reasonably practicable to do so;
- If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risks completely, to reduce them to as low a level as is reasonably practicable;
- Introduce a formal programme of measures to reduce noise exposure whenever an employee's exposure to noise is likely to exceed the upper exposure action values (these measures cannot include hearing protection, which is addressed separately);
- Not to expose anyone above the exposure limit value.

21.0 How should hearing protectors be used?

Personal hearing protection should only be used:

- Where there is a need to provide additional protection beyond what has been achieved through noise-control measures;
- As an interim measure while you are developing those control measures;
- It should not be used as an alternative to controlling noise by technical and organisational means;
- The duty to provide hearing protectors depends on the exposure levels:
- Where employees are exposed between the lower and upper exposure action values Shropshire Council have to provide protectors to employees who ask for them, but the noise regulations do not make their use compulsory;
- Where employees are likely to be exposed at or above the upper exposure action values, Shropshire Council must provide hearing protectors.
- Shropshire Council must ensure hearing protectors are used.
- Shropshire Council also need to provide information to employees about the protectors and how to obtain and use them correctly.

22.0 What is health surveillance?

Health surveillance is a programme of systematic health checks to identify early signs and symptoms of work-related ill health and to allow action to be taken to prevent its progression. It is also useful in monitoring the effectiveness of risk controls.

Suitable health surveillance usually means regular hearing checks (audiometric testing). Typically, this should be carried out by an occupational health physician or nurse.

The regulations require Shropshire Council to provide suitable health surveillance where the risk assessment indicates a risk to workers' health; i.e. a risk from exposure to noise without taking account of the noise reduction provided by hearing protection.

The results of health surveillance will enable a check to be made whether the hearing protection programme has prevented hearing damage.

The Occupational Health Service will liaise closely with the Health & Safety

Team, Human Resources Officers and Line Managers in order to provide a health surveillance programme for employees at risk from noise.

There is strong evidence to show that regular exposure above the upper exposure action value can pose a risk to health. Shropshire Council are therefore required to provide health surveillance to workers regularly exposed at or above the upper exposure action value of 85dB(A).

Where exposure is between the lower and upper exposure action values, or where employees are only occasionally exposed above the upper exposure action value, Shropshire Council will provide health surveillance if they find out that an individual is particularly sensitive to noise. This may be from past medical history, audiometric test results from previous jobs, other independent assessments or a history of exposure to noise levels exceeding the upper exposure action values. A few individuals may also indicate a family history of becoming deaf early on in life.

The manager will organise any subsequent reviews of the employee and arrange appropriate appointments with the Occupational Health Service.

On leaving the employment of the Council, employees must be referred to the Occupational Health Service in order that a final assessment may be undertaken.

23.0 What information, instruction and training is required?

If employees are exposed to levels of noise at or above the lower action value 80 dB(A) then the Council must ensure that they are made aware of the following issues:

- The likely noise exposure level and the risk to hearing the noise creates.
- What Shropshire Council is doing to control risks and exposures.
- Where and how people can obtain hearing protectors.
- How to report defects in hearing protectors and noise control equipment.
- The employee's duties under the noise regulations.
- What health surveillance employees will be provided with and how the Council is going to provide it.
- What symptoms employees should look out for (such as difficulty in understanding speech in conversation or when using the telephone, or permanent ringing in the ears), to whom they should report them and how they should report them.

Appendix

Glossary of Terms

Sound: That which is detected by the ear.

Noise: Any audible sound.

Sound Pressure: The variation of ambient pressure that is detected by the ear as sound.

Decibel (dB): Ten times the logarithm of the square of the ratio of the Sound Pressure to a reference pressure (20 micro-Pascals).

A-Weighting: A frequency weighting which simulates the response of the human ear. Sound pressure levels with the "A" weighting have units of dB(A).

Leq: The value of the sound pressure level, in dB, of a continuous steady sound which has the same mean-square sound pressure as a sound that varies with time, i.e. the "average" sound pressure level.

LEP,d: The "daily personal noise exposure level". This is the level of daily personal noise exposure of an employee, taking no account of the effect of any personal ear protector used.

LEP,w: The "weekly personal noise exposure level". This is the level of weekly personal noise exposure of an employee, taking no account of any personal ear protector used.

Lcpeak: The peak sound pressure level in dB(C).

Sound Pressure Level (Lp)The decibel version of the Sound Pressure.

Lower Action Value: An LEP,d or LEP,w personal noise exposure of 80 dB(A); and Lcpeak of 135 dB(C).

Upper Action Value: An LEP,d or LEP,w personal noise exposure of 85 dB(A); and Lcpeak of 137 dB(C).

Exposure Limit Value: An LEP,d or LEP,w personal noise exposure of 87 dB(A); and Lcpeak of 140 dB(C). Personal ear protection can be taken into account when measuring the Exposure Limit Value.

Noise Questionnaire

To ensure compliance with the Control of Noise at Work Regulations and to identify areas of work that might require attention this short questionnaire has been devised.

Your answers to the questionnaire will allow the identification of high-risk areas and staff who may be at risk. Subsequently it will be possible to focus on those areas as a priority and to put in place any changes that might be deemed necessary.

Name

Job Title

Work Base

Department

In answering the questions please tick the appropriate answer.

How often do any of your workers have to **shout** to be heard when 2 metres away from each other?

	Tick box
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rarely (e.g. once or twice per year)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once every few months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Daily	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constantly (more than 2 hours per day)	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your answer to question 1 is never or rarely do not continue but please return the questionnaire to the address at the end of the form; otherwise continue answering the questions.

Consider each statement

2. We have carried out a noise assessment with help from someone with suitable qualifications or competence and know who is exposed to high noise levels and why.

Yes No

3. We have involved workers in considering how we can reduce noise levels by engineering controls and workplace or job design.

Yes **No**

4. We have trained our workers on how to operate noisy equipment so that it produces the least noise possible.

Yes **No**

5. We check whether workers already have any health problems (e.g. hearing trouble or tinnitus) and make sure that any work they do will not make it worse.

Yes **No**

6. We ensure, by instruction and supervision, that no one (including contractors and temporary workers), works in areas where they must shout to be heard without hearing protection.

Yes **No**

7. We have involved workers in choosing hearing protection equipment and have trained them on why, how and where they must wear it.

Yes **No**

8. We provide regular hearing checks at least once every two years for workers who work in noisy areas (or circle yes if your noise assessment shows that you do not need to do this so often).

Yes **No**

9. We have directed all workers that if they experience any hearing problems or have concerns about noise levels, they are to stop working in the noisy environment and report their symptoms to their manager.

Yes **No**

10. Named and trained manager(s) or supervisor(s) regularly check compliance with noise control measures.

Yes **No**

Many thanks for your help.

If you have any questions, contact the Occupational Health and Safety Team on 01743-252819.

Please return to: Occupational Health and Safety Team

Shirehall,

Abbey Foregate,

Shrewsbury

SY2 6ND