

**31 March 2011**

## **HEALTHY LIVES, HEALTHY PEOPLE - RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S WHITE PAPER CONSULTATIONS**

I have been campaigning, on the issue of unwelcome noise since 1991 when I set up the 'Right to Peace and Quiet' campaign, with the late comedian Spike Milligan, who agreed to be the group's patron.

In 1997 I was awarded an MBE for my role in raising awareness of domestic noise issues and lobbying and campaigning services. I went on to be a founding member of the UK Noise Association; a collaboration of noise campaigners, experts, and academics. I was appointed to the position of National Coordinator in 2005, but left the role in 2007 and was appointed Honorary President of the Association in 2010.

Since the General Election in 2010 I have continued to raise awareness of noise issues and have been instrumental in setting up and attending meetings with advisers to the new coalition government. I have also recently co-authored a book "Why Noise Matters" with the UK Noise Association<sup>1</sup>.

In January 2011, I was approached by **Noisedirect – National Noise Advice Line**<sup>2</sup> and asked to take on the position of **Noise Tzar**; a role that the previous Labour government had often talked about, but which failed to materialise. I had

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<sup>1</sup> 'Why Noise Matters' A Worldwide Perspective on the Problems, Policies and Solutions. By John Stewart, with Arline Bronzaft, Francis McManus, Nigel Rodgers and **Val Weedon**. To be published by Earthscan August 2011. ISBN 9781849712576. Pre order available.

<sup>2</sup> Noisedirect was founded in 2005 and is the UK's first independent, national, Noise Advice Line. Noisedirect Advice Line is provided by Sanctum Consultants; an Environmental Health Consultancy. Noisedirect operates between 10am–4pm Monday to Friday with the option of evening and weekend appointments. Callers (whether noise makers or sufferers, landlords, employers, licensed premises etc) can discuss any noise problem or issue for a fixed fee of £39 for a 30 minute interview and speak to qualified Environmental Health Professionals by phoning a low cost national number in confidence. Noisedirect can also provide independent advice on informal resolution for noise problems along with advice on legal action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 or in the County Court for nuisance or personal injury.

long been a keen supporter of the accessible and professional services provided by Noisedirect.

**Noisedirect** already provides a *"new approach that empowers individuals to make healthy choices and gives communities the tools to address their own, particular needs"* which the White paper advocates. Noisedirect professionals are witness to the impact that environmental factors, and health inequalities have on noise sufferers. The sweeping cuts to public funding and the new localism agenda means that the divide and disparity in noise services provided by local Councils and responses to statutory functions will become greater.

**Noisedirect** professionals speak daily to individuals across the country who simply want to exercise their 'Right to Peace and Quiet' in their homes and stop unwanted noise whether from anti social behaviour, transport, industry or domestic noise. The common theme that emerges from calls to Noisedirect is that the current system is under resourced, understaffed, and inequitable.

Since the introduction of the Housing Act 2004 powers have been available to Councils to take action for *"threats to physical and mental health resulting in exposure to noise inside a dwelling or within its curtilage"*. Yet these powers are not widely used despite the fact that year on year **Noisedirect** receives an increase in the numbers of calls relating to noise from inadequate sound insulation and psychological hazards from noise.

Whilst I am heartened in my role as **Noise Tzar** that the government is committed to reducing *"the percentage of the population affected by environmental, neighbour, and neighbourhood noise;"* based on years of campaigning experience I firmly believe that this can only be achieved through a raft of positive measures which include:

- A pledge to ring fence government funding to enable Environmental Health Departments to expeditiously carry out statutory functions under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Housing Act 2004.
- Introduce legislation to allow individuals to appoint and authorise independent Environmental Health Practitioners (registered with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health) to act on their behalf to help improve the health of individuals and communities by serving Hazard

Awareness and Nuisance Notices, on behalf of individuals, where issues affecting public health exist.

- Amend the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 to allow any person aggrieved by a Category 1 Noise Hazard within their dwelling, to apply to the local Magistrates Court for the abatement of the Hazard.
- Stop the postcode lottery for investigating noise complaints. Where local authorities fail to carry out inspections in accordance with their statutory duties under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Housing Act 2004, then the Local Government Ombudsman should be granted powers to impose a £25 fixed penalty victim fine payable by Councils to complainants.

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**Noise Tzar**

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