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Petitions Committee

Fireworks

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Petitions Committee

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Summary

Fireworks have been a popular topic for e-petitions during this Parliament. Individuals and campaign groups have used the e-petitions system to express a wide range of concerns, including: noise from fireworks having serious detrimental effects on people and animals; misuse of fireworks and anti-social behaviour blighting local communities; and environmental issues.

The Petitions Committee has scheduled three debates in Parliament on petitions relating to fireworks that had each gained more than 100,000-signatures. In total, petitions calling for tighter restrictions on the sale and use of fireworks by the general public have attracted around 750,000 signatures in three years. While the Government expressed “empathy” for people and animals affected, it was clear it had no plans to change the law. The Government’s responses to these petitions, and Ministers’ replies to the debates, left petitioners feeling frustrated and ignored. We undertook this inquiry to hear their concerns and propose changes in response to them.

We looked closely at the proposal to ban sales and use of fireworks by the public but were not persuaded to recommend this drastic course of action at this time. There are valid concerns, backed up by evidence from overseas, that a ban could have unintended consequences. A ban would have a substantial economic effect, which would be most keenly felt by people who have built their livelihoods on the fireworks industry. A ban would likely have dire consequences for competently-run, voluntary, community displays, which use fireworks to raise funds for local good causes. In many cases these community displays have widespread local support and increase community cohesion.

However, our inquiry has found clear evidence that petitions calling for greater restrictions on sales and use of fireworks have been motivated by justified concerns. In many cases, there are substantial adverse effects, for example on people with a very wide range of health conditions and disabilities. There can be very distressing effects on people with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, including military veterans. Animals can suffer serious and long-term effects. It is not good enough for the Government to repeatedly claim that the law protects these people and animals from harm. It does not. We now expect action, rather than continued apathy.

Loud and high-pitched noises can adversely affect a large proportion of animals, whose hearing is often much more sensitive than humans’. The decibel level limit of consumer fireworks needs to be reconsidered, with animal welfare in mind, with a view to setting a workable reduced maximum decibel limit that would diminish the risks to animals’ health.

Inconsiderate or irresponsible use of fireworks can have appalling effects on people too, but we were frustrated by the lack of official data on the extent and nature of the problems. Any rule about who can set off fireworks, and where and when they can be used, would be difficult to enforce because fireworks are inherently transient. A lack of enforceability is likely suppressing the number of complaints, meaning the real level of concern is under-reported. People must be enabled, and encouraged, to make their concerns known. There must be a coordinated effort led by the Government, across the relevant agencies, to establish a consistent approach to the collection and publication of

data about the types and extent of problems associated with fireworks.

Local authorities must be empowered to act where they deem it necessary in response to their residents' concerns. We recommend the Government work with local authorities to identify a best practice approach to a revenue-neutral, mandatory permit system for fireworks displays, where local evidence suggests this is necessary to protect the community. We want to see a scheme piloted by the end of 2020.

It is imperative that consumer fireworks are only sold to the public through legitimate retailers with the appropriate licences and by staff with the appropriate level of training to advise customers about safe and responsible use. The Government should act quickly to close a potential loophole in the regulations around storage by retailers of up to 5kg of fireworks without a licence. It should also conduct a review of online sales of fireworks, particularly over social media, with a view to establishing a national, cross-agency strategy to tackle illegal online sales before October 2020.

Packaging of consumer fireworks in a way which may appeal to children creates a risk that children may be tempted to play or tamper with potentially dangerous products stored in the home. The Government should act swiftly to address this through new packaging Regulations as soon as possible, and no later than November 2020.

Inconsiderate and irresponsible use of fireworks should be considered as socially unacceptable as drink driving. There is very clear evidence that loud unexpected noise from fireworks has severe and distressing effects on people with a range of health conditions and disabilities, including military veterans and others suffering with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), children with autistic spectrum disorders and people with hyperacusis and other hearing conditions. If people are going to use fireworks, they must let their neighbours know in advance, so that people can take steps to protect themselves if they need to. The Government must fund and coordinate major, national awareness campaigns, from October 2020 and annually thereafter, on responsible use of fireworks to get this message across to the public.

The Government has so far failed to act in response to legitimate concerns about fireworks expressed through the e-petitions system. People rightly expect the Government to listen to them, take their concerns seriously, and act. The Government's response to this Report is its chance to finally do that.

1 Fireworks e-petitions and the need for this inquiry

Our role

1. We oversee and act on e-petitions submitted to the UK Parliament and Government through petitions.parliament.uk. All such e-petitions that get over 10,000 signatures receive a UK Government response. We automatically consider all e-petitions that receive over 100,000 signatures for debate in Westminster Hall.¹

2. E-petitions allow members of the public to bring their concerns directly to the UK Parliament. We can also act on e-petitions by asking the Government for more information and, like other Select Committees, launching inquiries, hearing from witnesses and making recommendations to Government in reports like this one. Like other Select Committees, we expect the Government to respond to our recommendations within two months.

Fireworks e-petitions

3. Fireworks have been a popular topic for e-petitions during this Parliament. Individuals and campaign groups have used the e-petitions systems to express a wide range of concerns, including about noise from fireworks affecting animals and people; misuse of fireworks and anti-social behaviour; and environmental issues.

4. When we launched our inquiry in February 2019, there were 11 e-petitions about fireworks open for signatures. They requested actions including: calls for quieter or silent fireworks; for the law to raise the age restrictions on buying fireworks; greater restrictions on use of fireworks during daytime hours; a new permit or licensing system for firework displays, including those in domestic gardens; restricting sales of fireworks to licensed gun shops; and a total ban on public sales and use, and restriction of fireworks use to professional, licensed displays only. These petitions, ordered by the number of signatures they gained, are listed below:

- **Ban the sale of fireworks to the public. Displays for licenced venues only** ([e-petition 231147](#)): closed on 30 April 2019 with **307,897 signatures**
- **Pass a law that only allows the sale of Quiet Fireworks to the general public** ([e-petition 232038](#)): closed on 13 May 2019 with **1,199 signatures**
- **Change the laws for fireworks only to use silent fireworks** ([e-petition 231604](#)): closed on 8 May 2019 with **955 signatures**
- **Increase firework restrictions to prevent use during daytime** ([e-petition 232109](#)): closed on 13 May 2019 with **279 signatures**
- **Full ban on the purchase of fireworks & displays** ([e-petition 231962](#)): closed on 12 May 2019 with **205 signatures**

¹ See www.petition.parliament.uk and www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee

- **Create a permit system for garden fireworks and when they can be used** ([e-petition 231965](#)): closed on 12 May 2019 with **99 signatures**
- **Raise the age of sale, of fireworks, to the general public from 18 to 25** ([e-petition 231437](#)): closed on 30 April 2019 with **87 signatures**
- **Ban Fireworks that are toxic to both the environment and humans!** ([e-petition 231806](#)): closed on 12 May 2019 with **36 signatures**
- **Stop firework work displays on armistice Sunday** ([e-petition 232653](#)): closed on 26 May 2019 with **13 signatures**
- **Fireworks should only be sold in registered gun shops** ([e-petition 232653](#)): closed on 8 May 2019 with **13 signatures**
- There was also one counter-petition, against fireworks being banned. ([e-petition 232242](#)), which closed on 12 May 2019 with **424 signatures**

5. The most popular recent petition, created by Amy Cullen, called for a ban on the sale of fireworks to the public and for fireworks displays to be restricted to licensed venues only. Amy's petition stated:

Every year fireworks are set off unnecessarily. Fireworks are a nuisance to the public. They scare animals, young children and people with a phobia. They injure thousands of people every year. They cause damage to buildings, vehicles, emergency vehicles and lastly kids are still being sold them.²

Our inquiry

6. In recent years, several petitions about fireworks have reached the 10,000-signature threshold and received a formal response from the Government. Amy Cullen's petition far-exceeded the 100,000-signature threshold and was debated in Westminster Hall in November 2018.³ Three other petitions, all calling for greater restrictions or bans on public sales or use of fireworks, passed the 100,000-signature threshold:

- **Restrict the use of fireworks to reduce stress and fear in animals and pets, created by Julie Doorne** ([e-petition 109702](#)): closed on 2 April 2016 with **104,038 signatures**⁴
- **Ban the sale of fireworks to the public and only approve organised displays, created by Mike Old.** ([e-petition 168663](#)): closed on 10 April 2017 with **168,160 signatures**
- **Change the laws governing the use of fireworks to include a ban on public use, created by Julie Doorne** ([e-petition 201947](#)): closed on 6 April 2018 with **113,284 signatures**⁵

In total, fireworks e-petitions had attracted around 750,000 signatures in three years.

² E-petition 231147, [Ban the sale of fireworks to the public. Displays for licenced venues only](#)

³ You can read a transcript of the Westminster Hall debate on Amy Cullen's petition. See HC Deb, 26 November 2018, [cols 144WH](#)

⁴ Debated in Westminster Hall, see HC Deb, 6 June 2016, [cols 1-30WH](#)

⁵ Debated in Westminster Hall, see HC Deb, 29 January 2018, [cols 227-63WH](#)

7. Despite the number of e-petitions about fireworks and the large number of signatures they attract each year, the Government's response to these petitions has consistently been that it believes the legislation and guidance already in place is appropriate and proportionate. For example, in her reply to the Westminster Hall debate on Amy's petition in November 2018, Kelly Tolhurst MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, emphasised that, while she empathised with people's concerns and understood the strong feelings:

We have legislation in place to regulate the supply, storage, possession, use and misuse of fireworks, to help to ensure public safety. These powers include powers to prosecute those who use fireworks in a dangerous or antisocial manner. Together, the restrictions set out in the Fireworks Act 2003, the Fireworks Regulations 2004 and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 provide the regulatory framework that seeks to support the public's enjoyment of fireworks while effectively managing the risk of fireworks harming individuals, property or animals.⁶

8. The regulatory framework in relation to fireworks as a consumer product:

- categorises fireworks as **F1 (indoor) fireworks**, which can be sold to people aged 16 years and over; **F2 (outdoor, confined space) fireworks**, which can be sold to and used by people aged 18 and over in confined outdoor spaces such as back gardens; **F3 (display) fireworks** for use by people aged 18 and over in large outdoor areas; and **F4 (professional display) fireworks**, the most powerful category of fireworks, which are not to be sold to the general public and are intended for use only by people with specialist knowledge;
- **prohibits use of fireworks between 11pm and 7am, except on dates where fireworks are used for traditional or cultural events.** On 5 November, the curfew is extended until midnight; on New Year's Eve, Chinese New Year and Diwali the curfew is extended until 1am;
- **restricts the periods during which retailers without a special licence can sell fireworks to dates around the four protected traditional/cultural events:** i.e. around 5 November (from 15th October to 10 November); New Year's Eve (from December 26th to 31st); Chinese New Year (on the first day of the Chinese New Year and the 3 days immediately preceding it); and Diwali (on the day of Diwali and the 3 days immediately preceding it);
- **limits the noise level of consumer fireworks to 120 decibels;** and
- **grants enforcement powers to local authorities and the police against misuse of fireworks,** including on-the-spot fines of £90, and prosecutions, which can result in fines of up to £5,000 and/or a prison sentence of up to six months.⁷

9. Despite insisting it takes the issues "very seriously", the Government appeared to downplay petitioners' concerns and has consistently stated that it has no plans to strengthen the law. For example, the Government's response to Julie Doorne's 2018 petition stated:

6 HC Deb, 26 November 2018, [col 38WH](#)

7 For a comprehensive summary of the regulatory framework, see Regulation of Fireworks, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper [05704](#), October 2018

Although a small minority of people use fireworks in a dangerous, inconsiderate or anti-social manner, we believe that the majority use them sensibly and responsibly. [...] the number of injuries is low and the total number of hospital admissions caused by firework injuries has remained below 200 a year for the last 10 years.[...] The Government believes that the current regulations strike the right balance between the enjoyment of fireworks by the public and restricting the sale and use of fireworks for public safety reasons.⁸

This has left petitioners feeling frustrated. That's why, in response to the clear strength of public feeling, we decided to launch an inquiry.

10. We have used this inquiry to give people the opportunity to raise and explain their concerns directly with us and in more detail than an e-petition alone allows. We wanted to demonstrate through our inquiry that, where people use petitions to raise an issue, we are committed to listening and taking concerns seriously, and pressing the Government for change. As our Chair said during the debate on Amy Cullen's petition, the alternative is that "we will have petition after petition and debate after debate until the Government start to take notice."⁹

11. We published wide-ranging terms of reference and received more than 350 written submissions from members of the public, animal welfare organisations, bonfire societies and other non-professional groups who put on community fireworks displays, fireworks professionals and specialist retailers, the Association of Convenience Stores, the Health and Safety Executive and the National Fire Chiefs Council.¹⁰

12. Our schedule of oral evidence began with evidence from a petitioner, Sue Kerr, representing the anti-fireworks campaign group, Fireworks Abatement UK, founded by Julie Doorne. We then heard an industry perspective from the British Fireworks Association, followed by oral evidence from representatives of regulatory and enforcement agencies, including the Health and Safety Executive, the Fireworks Enforcement Liaison Group, and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, alongside the Association of Convenience Stores. We completed our oral evidence schedule by hearing from the RSPCA, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the National Police Chiefs Council. A full list of witnesses is set out at the end of this Report.¹¹

13. From the beginning and throughout, the voices of the public were central to our inquiry. We conducted our largest-ever online survey, which 42,629 people took the time to complete.¹² We arranged face-to-face events to hear directly from military veterans, including those suffering with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, and people with other health conditions and disabilities. We also held an event with fireworks enthusiasts, particularly those involved in bonfire societies and other non-professional, community-run displays, and an industry body, the CBI's Explosives Industry Group. Our colleagues in Parliament's Education Service surveyed the views and experiences of school students

8 Government response to [e-petition 201947](#), Change the laws governing the use of fireworks to include a ban on public use

9 HC Deb, 26 November 2018, [col 6WH](#)

10 You can read the full terms of reference on our website: <https://www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee>.

11 You can read the full terms of reference on our website: <https://www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee>.

12 See Annex A: Summary of survey results

aged 10–18. We've included summaries of all these public engagement activities in annexes to this Report.¹³ We're very grateful to everyone who contributed, particularly those who related their personal experiences.

14. We very quickly became aware of the strength of feeling both for and against greater regulation of fireworks: while there are many who believe strongly that fireworks are a scourge and that radical change is needed, people in the fireworks industry and many fireworks enthusiasts feel equally strongly that the law as it stands either does, or at least could and should, provide a balance between allowing people to enjoy fireworks responsibly and protecting people, animals and property from harm.

15. We have listened carefully to people with a wide-range of views about the use of fireworks, both positive and negative. Our conclusions and recommendations are intended to try to find some common ground. We have identified clear loopholes in the current legal framework, which the Government should act swiftly to close in the interest of those who sell and enjoy fireworks and those who are concerned about their use. Above all, we believe the Government's response to this Report will be an opportunity for it to begin to demonstrate that it's listening too, and is willing to act to address legitimate concerns, while enabling people to enjoy fireworks responsibly.

2 The practical implications of a ban on public sales and use

16. As set out in chapter 1, hundreds of thousands of people have signed e-petitions calling for a ban on public sales and use of fireworks and for fireworks to be restricted to professionally-run, licensed displays only. We wanted to give this proposal our full consideration.

17. The case for a ban on public sales and use was made from an animal welfare perspective and by, and on behalf of, groups of people who can be particularly adversely affected, such as people with a wide range of health conditions and disabilities and military veterans and others suffering with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.¹⁴ We discuss these concerns, and ways of addressing them, in more detail in chapters 3 and 4.

Effects of a ban on community groups and local fund-raising

18. Several concerns were raised about the potential consequences, some unintended, of a ban. For example, we received evidence from several community-based groups, including Sussex bonfire societies, schools and grass-roots sports clubs, who were deeply concerned about our inquiry and the potential consequences of us recommending a ban.¹⁵ These groups emphasised that their displays were run by competent, but non-professional, people. Their displays raised considerable funds, either for their own running costs or for local good causes. For example, a Surrey school told us its display raised around £2,500 each year.¹⁶ A professional company's fees for running an event would amount to a substantial proportion of this figure.¹⁷ A ban on public use of fireworks would therefore have potentially dire consequences for them.¹⁸

19. The community groups we heard from argued their displays were supported by the local community and improved community cohesion. They took steps to ensure local people were aware of when and where displays were happening, so that people who might be adversely affected could take steps to mitigate the effects. The groups we spoke to reported there were very few, if any, complaints about noise or other issues. All the groups told us they worked closely with the local community to address any concerns. Sussex bonfire societies argued that their events were part of the unique cultural identity of their area.¹⁹

Potential unintended consequences

20. The fireworks industry raised practical concerns about the implications of a ban on public sales and use. Steve Raper, Vice Chairman of the British Fireworks Association, argued there would be insufficient professional fireworks companies to meet demand, which could have implications for safety:

14 See Annex B: Summary of public engagement with military veterans and Annex C: Summary of public engagement with people with health conditions and disabilities

15 See Annex D: Summary of roundtable meeting with community groups and explosives industry; also, Chris Galvin ([FWS0001](#)); Mark Priest, Firework Crazy Ltd ([FWS0357](#))

16 See Annex D: Summary of roundtable meeting with community groups and explosives industry

17 [Q56](#) [Fraser Stevenson]

18 See Annex D: Summary of roundtable meeting with community groups and explosives industry

19 See Annex D: Summary of roundtable meeting with community groups and explosives industry

The simple answer to that question is that it would not work. There are not enough professional firework companies in the UK to fill that market. If there were, they would be doing it already. [...] The current pro providers would be stretched. You would see an upsurge in pop-up professional display operators trying to fill the gap. That is not an ideal situation.²⁰

21. Other experts raised concerns about the likely ineffectiveness of a ban. Dr Tom Smith, Managing Director of major professional display company, Carndu Limited, and the Explosive Industry Group's Chairman, emphasised that evidence from overseas suggested stricter restrictions on public use could be counter-productive. He noted that places where bans were in place throughout almost the entire year tended to have more injuries when fireworks were permitted. Berlin, for example, had a poor safety record on New Year's Eve, the only night of the year when public use of fireworks was permitted.²¹ Others raised concerns about the economic effects of a ban, particularly the effects on the general and specialist retail sector.²²

Emergence of a black market

22. The National Fire Chiefs Council and the National Police Chiefs Council were concerned about the possibility of a ban pushing sales underground and creating a black market of potentially dangerous products.²³ Fraser Stevenson, Director of Absolute Fireworks, noted that the police in the Republic of Ireland, where the general public are banned from using fireworks, had raised concerns about dangerous illegal fireworks entering the country and causing injuries.²⁴ Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Andy Prophet, the anti-social behaviour lead of the National Police Chiefs Council, told us that, "If a black market became available, it would be even more difficult to police than the situation we currently have, which would be a really unhelpful unintended consequence."²⁵

23. We have listened carefully to concerns about banning public sales and use of fireworks. There are valid concerns about the likely effects on community groups and their local fund-raising efforts. For some groups, for example in Sussex, community-run, non-professional displays form an important part of an area's unique culture and identity. There are also genuine concerns about the likely ineffectiveness of a ban, including some evidence from overseas that a ban could have unintended and counter-productive consequences for public safety. A ban on public sales would have a substantial economic effect, which would be most keenly felt by people who have built their livelihoods on the fireworks industry.

24. While people who want to ban the public from buying and using fireworks have valid concerns that must be addressed, we cannot support a ban before other, less drastic but potentially more effective, options have been fully explored.

20 [Q54](#)

21 See Annex D: Summary of roundtable meeting with community groups and explosives industry

22 See, for example, [Q186-8](#) [Chris Kemp]; Mark Priest, Firework Crazy Ltd ([FWS0357](#))

23 See, for example, [Q203](#) [Chris Kemp]; [Q205](#) [ACC Prophet]

24 [Q58](#)

25 [Q205](#)

3 Assessing the extent of problems and empowering effective local responses

25. In this chapter, we set out what the public told us about the nature of problems associated with fireworks. We describe our attempts to establish the extent of these problems, and our frustration about the lack of official data. We emphasise the inherent difficulties in enforcing the rules around domestic use of fireworks and the lack of protection for people and animals against frequent disturbance by fireworks, which suggests a new approach may be necessary in some places. Our recommendations focus on improving data collection and empowering local authorities and enforcement agencies to act where and when they think it necessary.

Fireworks and animals

26. Our survey of people who have signed petitions showed that most people who have concerns about fireworks are worried about the effects of fireworks noise on animals. Nearly 30,000 people (about 70% of those who completed our survey and expressed a primary concern) told us this was their main issue. Of these, the largest group was owners of domestic pets, particularly dogs. We read thousands of comments from pet owners recounting very similar experiences, for example:

“In our experience of owning 6 dogs over different periods, dogs are absolutely petrified of fireworks. The fear is beyond anything I see in the dogs at any other time. They cry, cower away, whimper, chew through power cables and rugs, etc.”; and

“My dog is terrified of fireworks, every year he has to take diazepam plus many other ‘aids’ to relax him during the fireworks just to calm him down which don’t work, he gets extremely stressed to the point he will be sick.”²⁶

27. While dog owners were the largest group, owners of other domestic pets told us about similar experiences.²⁷ In written evidence to the inquiry, horse owners recounted some particularly distressing experiences, including injuries sustained when horses take flight in response to the noise of fireworks.²⁸

28. The evidence of animal owners was challenged by people working in the fireworks industry and fireworks enthusiasts. They argued that evidence of the effects on animals was anecdotal, often exaggerated and not borne out by official data.²⁹ Some argued that animal ownership was a lifestyle choice, which should not override their own lifestyle choice to enjoy fireworks responsibly, in accordance with the law.³⁰ There was clear evidence presented, however, that fireworks can produce fear responses in a substantial proportion of animals. For example, the RSPCA noted a 2013 study, which showed that fireworks were the most common cause of fear responses in dogs, and a 2005 study of

26 See Annex A: Summary of survey results

27 See, for example, Mrs Vivienne Scott ([FWS0047](#)); Mr Henry Bowden ([FWS0092](#)); Vanessa Lord ([FWS0173](#))

28 See, for example, Miss Lindsay M Horner ([FWS0003](#)); Mrs Samantha Durham ([FWS0354](#)); Redwings’ Horse Sanctuary ([FWS0337](#));

29 See, for example, Jonathan’s Fireworks Ltd ([FWS0230](#)); Jonathan West ([FWS0242](#)); Bright Star Fireworks ([FWS0250](#)); Mr Glen Pearson ([FWS0321](#))

30 See, for example, Jonathan West ([FWS0242](#)); Mr Dieter Wadeson ([FWS0299](#)); Mr Glen Pearson ([FWS0321](#));

firework fears and phobias in dogs, which found that 45% show signs of fear when they hear fireworks. The RSPCA noted that animals which display fear responses “not only suffer psychological distress but can also cause themselves injuries, sometimes very serious ones, as they attempt to run or hide from the noise.”³¹

29. The British Veterinary Association confirmed that the effects of fireworks noise on animals were real, and could lead to longer-term phobias:

Studies, reports and animal welfare organisations all agree that loud and high-pitched fireworks can have a negative impact on animal health and welfare by causing not just physical harm, but stress or fear responses across a range of species, including companion animals, wildlife, horses, livestock and zoo animals. [...] As animals have more acute hearing than humans, many show stress, fear or even phobia responses to loud and high-pitched noises.³²

30. We wanted to explore the scale of these problems, and where fireworks ranked amongst other animal welfare issues. The RSPCA told us that of the around 1.1 million calls it receives from the public each year, only around 400 were logged as being specifically related to issues with fireworks. However, Claire McParland, the RSPCA’s Government Relations Manager, said that this number was likely “the tip of the iceberg”, because many incidents go unreported. She acknowledged that:

The challenge is getting good, accurate data. One of the things that we flagged up is that there probably is insufficient information in a lot of these areas. [...] It seems like a very small thing, but the reality is that over a condensed period of time, from October through to January, it might take up quite a lot of our work.³³

31. Animal welfare organisations were united behind the RSPCA’s calls for change. Suggested recommendations included a reduction in the maximum noise level of consumer fireworks from 120 decibels to 90 decibels, based on recent studies of the effects on animal welfare, and for local authorities to be empowered to regulate public fireworks displays through licensing schemes.³⁴

32. Witnesses from the fireworks industry confirmed that the current decibel limit of 120 for consumer fireworks had been set based on the effects of noise on people, rather than animals.³⁵ Steve Raper, Vice Chairman of the British Fireworks Association, emphasised there were technical limitations on reducing noise from fireworks. He told us that:

You cannot have an absolutely quiet firework. The lifting charge on a firework for a shot tube is about 95 decibels, and that is just the cartridge being ejected into the air.³⁶

33. Loud and high-pitched noises can adversely affect a large proportion of animals, whose hearing is often much more sensitive than humans’. They can cause substantial

31 RSPCA ([FWS0336](#))

32 British Veterinary Association ([FWS0323](#))

33 [Q156](#)

34 RSPCA ([FWS0336](#))

35 [Q65](#) [Fraser Stevenson]

36 [Q64](#)

distress and lead to longer-term phobias and behavioural issues. *In the light of this evidence, we believe the decibel level limit of consumer fireworks needs to be looked at again, with animal welfare in mind. We recommend the Government lead a review, working with animal welfare experts and the fireworks industry, of the effects of fireworks noise on animal welfare, with a view to setting a workable reduced maximum decibel limit which would diminish the risks to animal health.*

Disproportionate effects on particular groups of people

People with health conditions and disabilities

34. Our survey of fireworks petitioners identified groups of people who can be particularly badly affected by fireworks. One was a broad group of people with a range of health conditions and disabilities, including anxiety disorders; bipolar disorder; cataplexy; cerebral palsy; dementia; epilepsy; fibromyalgia; hydrocephalus; hyperacusis; myalgic encephalomyelitis; multiple sclerosis; narcolepsy; Parkinson’s disease; and tinnitus.³⁷

35. Some of the experiences relayed to us via the survey were distressing, for example where parents described the experiences of their disabled children:

“[...] our son has severe complex needs including epilepsy, which can cause him to stop breathing. Loud, unexpected noises are often a trigger for this. [...] Sadly, at home where he should be safe and protected, members of the public are able to set fireworks off at any time, in the street or in their gardens, the laws are not enforced and we cannot guarantee how loud they are going to be [...] My son screams, has a seizure and has to be administered oxygen. This is distressing for all involved.”; and

“My nephew has autism and hearing fireworks triggers meltdowns for him. He screams and screams. It surprises me that more people don’t understand this [...].”³⁸

36. At a public engagement event, we discussed some of the effects on people in more detail. We spoke to a group of young people with learning disabilities, organisations which supported people with anxiety disorders and tinnitus and a paediatric doctor specialising in audiology. Experts emphasised that panic attacks instigated by fireworks noise were a common experience for people with a wide range of noise phobias, hearing problems, anxiety disorders and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The effects could be particularly severe for people suffering with hyperacusis, a heightened sensitivity to sound, which is particularly prevalent amongst children with autistic spectrum disorders. The effects weren’t only physical. Common coping strategies to avoid unexpected loud noises, such as staying indoors wearing ear defenders or travelling to remote areas, tended to exacerbate pre-existing feelings of isolation and “not being part of the fun”.³⁹

37. People told us about their preferred solutions to the problem. There was considerable support for a ban on public sales and use or local authority licensing schemes, but a

37 See Annex A: Summary of survey results and Annex C: Summary of engagement event with people with health conditions and disabilities

38 Annex A: Summary of survey results

39 Annex C: Summary of engagement event with people with health conditions and disabilities

key theme was promoting increased public awareness. The young people with learning disabilities told us they had no wish to “spoil people’s fun”. They wanted to see a return to “public service announcements”, with very widespread campaigns like the anti-drink-driving campaigns around Christmas. They thought young people should be made aware in schools and youth centres and that local communities should run “tell you neighbours” campaigns, to encourage people to inform others when they were planning fireworks displays.

Military veterans and combat-related Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

38. We had a similar conversation with military veterans, some of whom had been diagnosed with combat PTSD, who found fireworks very problematic. They told us about severe effects, on themselves and their families. We heard about loud unexpected noise from fireworks provoking “hyper-vigilance” in veterans. For example, a veteran reported instinctively diving for cover with his daughter. A partner of a veteran told us that fireworks had a “terrible” effect on family life for weeks during autumn. A veteran told us he’d “come out of [the armed forces] pretty unscathed, but for those three weeks around fireworks night it’s horrendous”. Another described disturbed sleep from late October until the New Year, with “horrible” consequences for family life.⁴⁰

39. Again, the strong preference was for a ban on public use or mandatory local authority permit schemes, but public awareness was also a strong theme. The veterans believed that the public were far less aware of the effects of fireworks on people like PTSD sufferers than they were about the effects on animals. It was felt that high profile, national campaigns, supported in the media by politicians could make a real difference.⁴¹ We return to the theme of raising public awareness and encouraging considerate and responsible use of fireworks in chapter 4.

“Year-round” fireworks

40. A regular theme in evidence was concern about the length of the “fireworks season”, which many people said now ran from late October through to January.⁴² Sue Kerr told us the season had become “noticeably longer” since the Millennium, after which fireworks had become much more popular.⁴³ While legislation restricts the periods during which retailers without a special licence can sell fireworks to certain days between mid-October and mid-February, for some people, the frequency of fireworks noise was exacerbated by year-round use of fireworks to celebrate weddings and other occasions. We heard from people who lived close to wedding venues, for whom this had become a problem in recent years. Written evidence and participants in our public engagement events noted that the current regulatory framework did nothing to protect them from the frequency of local fireworks displays, which legally could take place at any time of the year.⁴⁴

41. The current law does not offer people and animals enough protection from frequent disturbance by fireworks, particularly where there are numerous public and

40 Annex B: Summary of public engagement event with military veterans

41 Annex B: Summary of public engagement event with military veterans

42 See Annex A: Summary of survey results; see also, for example, Mrs Heidi Mitchell ([FWS0131](#)); Mr Kevin Williams ([FWS0137](#)); Tracey Smyth ([FWS0147](#)); Miss Nicky Williams ([FWS0170](#)); Sue Coulter ([FWS0178](#)); Martin Gray ([FWS0187](#))

43 [Q13](#)

44 See, for example, Lindsay Harrison ([FWS0183](#)); Mrs Christine Thomas ([FWS0221](#)); see also Annexes A-E

domestic displays around the traditional and religious dates and a growing number of displays at other celebratory events like birthdays and weddings. We believe local authorities should be empowered to limit the number of displays in their areas in these circumstances. *We recommend the Government work with local authorities to identify a best practice approach to a revenue-neutral, mandatory permit system for fireworks displays, where local evidence suggests this is necessary to protect the community. The Government should work with a local authority to pilot the approach before the end of 2020, with a view to legislating to empower all local authorities to establish mandatory permit schemes where they deem it necessary.*

Attacks on emergency services

42. Some witnesses noted media reports of attacks using fireworks on emergency services personnel. There was a perception that such attacks were common or increasing in some places.⁴⁵ The problem of attacks using fireworks was also referred to by respondents to our survey. Several serving emergency services workers used the survey to report incidents, for example:

“Every year fireworks are used as weapons against me and my colleagues across all emergency services. The Police are stretched enough but bonfire night for example we are having to have our days off cancelled to keep the fire service safe. I am bored of ducking fireworks that are fired at us.”; and

“It was Mischief night, when I got called to a fire near an electrical substation. It was in a car park next to a block of small flats with a cut through to a cul-de-sac and a road to the left. 15 males, approx 13–19 surrounded both sides and proceeded to set off fireworks directly at myself and my colleague. We proceeded to push through the crowd and run through the cut through. However, I had suffered temporary blindness and hearing loss and had suffered heat rash burns.”⁴⁶

43. However, the perception of a very widespread or growing problem was countered by the fireworks industry with information obtained from Freedom of Information (FOI) requests they had made. While some Fire and Rescue services that responded, such as Avon Fire and Rescue and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, had recorded a handful of attacks with fireworks on crew over the last six years, most had not recorded any at all.⁴⁷

44. However, these FOI responses did not reflect experiences all over the country. Chris Kemp of West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, representing the National Fire Chiefs Council, reported a very real and worrying problem with attacks on fire crew, often involving fireworks, in his part of the country:

We have evidence of calls being made to certain areas of certain cities almost as a trap for firefighters to be caught and then attacked with fireworks. Last year, we had 20 incidents of that, and in 2017 we had 30 incidents of that in West Yorkshire. If we look at the data from West Yorkshire, those attacks are specifically where firefighters have been attacked with a firework, but we

45 See, for example, Mrs Marion Roberts ([FWS0135](#)); Julie Doorne ([FWS0145](#)); Stuart Walsh ([FWS0198](#)); Claire Cooper ([FWS0290](#)); PDSA ([FWS0351](#))

46 Annex A: Summary of survey results

47 Bright Star Fireworks ([FWS0250](#))

have a whole host of attacks with other missiles and where verbal abuse has been given. On average, in about 21% of attacks on firefighters a firework has been used.⁴⁸

45. ACC Prophet of the National Police Chiefs Council could not provide similar figures for attacks on police, either for his own force of Essex or nationally, but confirmed that “The level of violence and the number of attacks committed towards officers and emergency service workers is increasing”. His view was that “there has not been a particular spike in attacks on police officers driven by fireworks in recent years” but there was no readily available national data to confirm this.⁴⁹

46. Any attack on emergency services workers is entirely unacceptable. It’s therefore hugely worrying that these attacks appear to be on the increase, and we welcome recent measures set out in the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 to tackle the broader issue. There is evidence that attacks involving fireworks make up a significant proportion of these incidents in some parts of the country, but we are concerned they are not being consistently recorded and published. Without complete and accurate data, it is not possible to understand the extent of the problem or take steps to rectify it through properly informed local decisions. We recommend the Government work with emergency services across the country to ensure that such incidents involving fireworks are specifically and consistently recorded across all local emergency services, and the data made publicly available.

Anti-social behaviour and misuse of fireworks affecting communities

47. After the effects of fireworks on animals, the next most frequently expressed concern was about a broad category of anti-social behaviour, ranging from a lack of common courtesy in informing neighbours about planned fireworks displays to much more serious misuse of fireworks and anti-social behaviour affecting communities. 4,552 people said that anti-social behaviour was their biggest issue with fireworks.

48. Commonly specified concerns included **fireworks being set off in the street or being set off very late at night by neighbours or near-neighbours**. Reports of very serious and dangerous anti-social behaviour were less common, but some incidents reported in our survey were distressing to read, for example:

“I’ve actually had a group of older teenagers set fireworks off 3 foot from my bedroom window late at night. In my previous flat high school children used to open the main door to the flat and throw fireworks in.”; and

“The neighbour’s back garden is 3 metres away from the front of my house (semi-detached). They used commercial fireworks and these were very powerful and frightening. When we protested, they pushed and hurt another neighbour.”⁵⁰

49. There were several common themes in responses to our survey from people concerned about their neighbours’ use of fireworks, including: **insufficient space** in small

48 [Q181](#)

49 [Q201](#)

50 See Annex A: Summary of survey results

residential gardens for the type of fireworks being used; neighbours using fireworks under the influence of **alcohol; damage to property; and fireworks debris littering** gardens and streets.⁵¹

50. There was a very strong perception in survey responses and written evidence that **current laws were unenforceable and that complaints were not acted on** by the police or councils. These comments were typical of the hundreds we received:

“My next-door neighbour set off some fireworks, which should only have been used at an organised event. He nearly set fire to our house and car, he caused thousands of pounds worth of damage. The fire service and police were involved but nothing happened to him.”

“The laws are not being enforced at all. They usually start at Halloween then continue every night for the rest of the month. They go off at all hours from 5pm until 5am.”

“The law is impossible to enforce, fireworks go off till the early hours of the morning and for longer than the specified occasions, for example bonfire night. They’re going off as soon as you can buy them continuously till New Year’s Eve.”

“I have called the police to report the use of fireworks until the early hours of the morning, when a festival is not in place. I have been told that it is not against the law and that if I have an issue I should call environmental health regarding this. I feel I was fobbed off just so the local police force didn’t have to bother with it.”⁵²

51. Local authority and police witnesses confirmed that enforcing fireworks law was challenging. In relation to the use of consumer fireworks in domestic gardens which were too small, Liz Vann, representing the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health suggested there was little, if anything, that could be done from a local authority enforcement perspective.⁵³

52. Rachel Hallam, a Trading Standards Officer at Worcestershire County Council and Chair of the Fireworks Enforcement Liaison Group, noted there was a safety guide for domestic firework displays produced by the Explosives Industry Group (EIG) and that all consumer fireworks were labelled with minimum safety distances. Essentially, compliance with the law relied heavily on people following these instructions; there was little that could be done after the event. She agreed that it was doubtful that many people planning a domestic fireworks display would take the trouble to read the EIG’s guide, or even always follow the instructions on the box to the letter:

Can we guarantee that everyone is going to read them? We all know from any purchase that we buy that not everybody reads the instructions. We can encourage people to read them and encourage retailers to have that conversation with customers when we do inspections. [...] But we cannot

51 See Annex A: Summary of survey results

52 Annex A: Summary of survey results; see also Mrs Rhoda Burns ([FWS0123](#)); Ms Michelle Page ([FWS0158](#)); Ms Penny Clarke ([FWS0205](#)); Mrs Debbie Rook ([FWS0261](#)); Ms Julie Drakeley ([FWS0287](#)); Miss Helen Wood ([FWS0328](#)); Mr David Hall ([FWS0332](#))

53 [Q133](#)

control what happens in a domestic environment. That is the same with any consumer product. Once they have bought it from the shop and had whatever instruction there is, what they are going to do with it and where they are going to set it off is in their hands.⁵⁴

53. Enforcing the night-time curfew was also considered very challenging, if not impossible. Rachel Hallam summed up the difficulty neatly, telling us that enforcing the curfew was a question of:

Is there somebody able to listen to it, to be able to take enforcement action? It is about being able to get evidence. With the police issuing a fixed penalty, unless they are in the area and able to do it there and then, it is on to the next action. It is quite a challenging one to enforce.⁵⁵

Echoing this point, ACC Prophet, told us:

It gets really tricky, doesn't it? If after a certain time a firework cannot be let off, it is a very clear line in the sand, but how do you find out who let the firework off? It comes back to that fundamental point. Unless you have, which we don't, an eye and a camera on every street corner, you will never find out who let the firework off, short of someone coming forward and telling you who it was. Even then, "It wasn't me." It is incredibly difficult.⁵⁶

54. There was disagreement between anti-fireworks campaigners and the industry about how common these issues were. In the face of a lack of official published data, industry witnesses had obtained data from local authorities and others using FOI requests. These showed very few recorded incidents of noise complaints, with many authorities that responded to the FOI request recording no complaints at all in some recent years.⁵⁷

55. In oral evidence, Steve Raper, Vice Chairman of the British Fireworks Association, argued this showed that problems associated with domestic fireworks noise were "nowhere near as bad" as petitioners' and campaigners' anecdotal evidence suggested.⁵⁸ Sue Kerr, on behalf of Fireworks Abatement UK, countered this argument by suggesting that people knew complaints would not, or could not, be acted on, and therefore tended not to complain, meaning that the FOI data under-reported the real level of noise nuisance problems:

You cannot complain to the local authority, because there is nothing it can do, unless it is the same person setting them off all the time, which it tends not to be. [...] We have also heard lots of times, on social media, that when somebody complains that fireworks are being used illegally and you suggest they ring the police, their response is always, "What's the point? They won't do anything; we've tried that before. They won't even give an incident number."⁵⁹

54 [Q135-6](#)

55 [Q148](#)

56 [Q197](#)

57 See, for example, Bright Star Fireworks ([FWS0250](#))

58 [Q62](#)

59 [Q20](#)

56. Fireworks are inherently transient, and, once they have been used, there may be little evidence of where or when they were set off. It's therefore inevitable that any rule about who can set off fireworks, and where and when they can be used, will be difficult to enforce. People are aware of this, including those who misuse fireworks and those for whom fireworks cause significant problems. It is likely that this is suppressing the number of complaints, meaning the real level of concern is under-reported.

57. We believe the first step towards addressing people's valid concerns about misuse of fireworks should be improving the collection and publication of data about the types and extent of problems associated with fireworks. While the challenges of enforcement are widely acknowledged, people must be enabled, and encouraged, to make their concerns known. It must be made clear to people how and to whom to report concerns. *We recommend the Government work with local authorities and police and fire services to review the systems in place for people to report concerns about misuse of fireworks, including breaches of the night-time curfew, use of fireworks in inappropriately small domestic gardens and other anti-social behaviour, with a view to establishing a consistent approach to data collection and publication. Local authorities must have systems in place to record incidents of concern to their residents. It is vital that local areas collect this information to inform local responses. We expect the Government to issue guidance to this effect before October 2020.*

4 Sales, packaging and public awareness

58. While we think empowering local authorities to control the number of displays in their areas in response to local problems is necessary, we do not think this will be enough to fully address people’s concerns. Consumer fireworks are heavily regulated products, which must conform to stringent safety standards, but a regular theme throughout our inquiry was that problems associated with fireworks were not inherent to the product but were about people’s misuse of them. Below we consider important aspects of encouraging safe and responsible use of consumer fireworks. We look at where and how they can be bought, how they are packaged and ways of raising public awareness about the potential adverse effects of fireworks on particular groups of people.

Sales

“Pop-up” stores and sales over social media

59. People who submitted written evidence and respondents to our survey, including members of the general public, people who were enthusiastic users of fireworks and fireworks retailers, raised concerns about sales of fireworks by seasonal “pop-up” outlets and sales over social media. There was a perception that such sales tended to be unlicensed and/or outlets for illegal products. Many people felt that a proliferation of pop-ups and unlicensed online sales made fireworks too easy to come by and that people selling through these means had little or no incentive to operate within the law, such as adherence to age restrictions, selling dates, provision of proper consumer protection or offering advice on safe use to those purchasing fireworks.⁶⁰ Several people expressed the view that sales of fireworks ought to be restricted to specialist retailers only.⁶¹ After we had concluded our inquiry, we noted with interest that Sainsbury’s announced that it would no longer sell fireworks in its 2,300 stores across the UK.⁶²

60. The British Fireworks Association told us it had concerns about illegal products being sold online, in particular via social media, and emphasised difficulties in addressing the problem. Industry witnesses believed fireworks bought through these channels were far more likely to be misused than those purchased from a legitimate retailer.⁶³

61. Steve Raper, Vice Chairman of the British Fireworks Association told us that legitimate retailers often reported these issues to local authority Trading Standards teams but found that “their hands are tied as to how they can respond”.⁶⁴ Fraser Stevenson, Director of Absolute Fireworks, reported that Trading Standards were sometimes unable to investigate because they were prevented from accessing social media on their office computers:

60 See, for example, Mrs Susanne Taggart ([FWS0031](#)); Mr Iain Morgan ([FWS0204](#)); Louise Cairns ([FWS0280](#)); Claire Cooper ([FWS0290](#)); Mr Gerald Lewis ([FWS0297](#)); See also, Annex A: Summary of survey results; Annex B: Summary of public engagement with military veterans

61 See, for example, Mr Michael Kearey ([FWS0161](#)); Marisa Morgan ([FWS0320](#)); Mrs Lisa Booth ([FWS0352](#))

62 “Sainsbury’s to stop selling fireworks”, *BBC News*, 18 October 2019

63 See, for example, [Q82](#) [Fraser Stevenson]

64 [Q47](#)

It is a strange situation, where we can report issues on Facebook but the local authority prohibits its staff from going on to Facebook to see what the problem is. You get the situation where they are not allowed access to social media sites or platforms within their IT structure.⁶⁵

62. Rachel Hallam, Worcestershire Trading Standards Officer and Chair of the Fireworks Enforcement Liaison Group, acknowledged there was an “undercurrent of illegal activity” via social media and confirmed that Trading Standards teams found it “challenging” to deal with. Her evidence to us suggested that enforcement was some way behind the curve of illegal sales via social media. For example, she told us:

[...] if somebody is advertising a firework on a Thursday, it might be sold or set off by Friday or Saturday. To create a sufficient enforcement team, or multi-agency operation, to try to address that can be quite challenging in such a short space of time. [...] it is not always possible to get information from social media in a clear and accurate way, because people do not always use their own name; they do not necessarily provide addresses to track them down, so quite a lot of work may have to go on in the background to find the sellers in the first place.⁶⁶

63. We are concerned about reports of illegal sales of fireworks online, particularly over social media. It’s imperative that consumer fireworks are only sold to the public through legitimate retailers with the appropriate licences and staff with the appropriate level of training to advise customers about safe and responsible use. It appears local authority Trading Standards teams lack the necessary skills and resources to address illegal online sales effectively. We recommend the Government conduct a review of online sales of fireworks, with a particular focus on sales via social media, with a view to establishing a national, cross-agency strategy to tackle the problem. The strategy should include measures to exert pressure on social media companies to identify and remove posts advertising unlicensed or illegal fireworks for sale on their platforms. We recommended this review be conducted, and a strategy published, before October 2020.

Storage and sales by non-specialist retailers without licence

64. As noted in chapter 1, the law is intended to prevent general retailers who do not hold a licence from selling fireworks outside of restricted periods around the four protected traditional/cultural events: 5 November; Diwali; New Year’s Eve; and Chinese New Year.⁶⁷

65. It appears that only a relatively small proportion of general retailers hold a licence to store fireworks, and therefore most do not sell them even during the designated periods. The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS), for example, told us that around 3,200 convenience stores, only 7% of the total number in the UK, hold a licence to store.⁶⁸

66. Retailers can, however, store up to 5kg of fireworks without a licence and can also apply for a licence to sell fireworks all year round. The ACS was initially unable to tell us how many of its members held an all year-round sales licence, but later conducted a survey of 1,574 of its members which found that 1.7% held such a licence. Applied to the

65 [Q47](#)

66 [Q102](#)

67 *Regulation of fireworks*, Briefing Paper [05704](#), House of Commons Library, October 2018

68 Association of Convenience Stores ([FWS0347](#))

total number of convenience stores, this would equate to fewer than 800 of the over 46,000 across the UK.⁶⁹ We remained uncertain, however, about the effects of the 5kg threshold, for example whether some retailers might be using it as a loophole to enable them to sell fireworks year-round without a licence.

67. We heard different explanations about the original intended purpose of the 5kg rule from regulatory authorities. Rachel Hallam told us it was originally put in place for category F1 indoor fireworks, such as “cake sparklers, party poppers and Christmas crackers”. It was intended to allow retailers to store and sell these low hazard products without the need for a £500 licence. She told us, however, that:

Over the last few years, people have been looking at the regulations and thinking that they could have 5 kg of fireworks and sell them all year round. That gives them a little more room in terms of fireworks. From an enforcement perspective, it is one area that it would probably be preferable to tie down a little bit more, because 5 kg of F1, which is an indoor firework, is completely different from 5 kg of an F3 product. That is one area where I know there are concerns [...]

She thought this was a clear potential loophole which ought to be closed. Her preference was for the Regulations to make explicit that the 5kg rule applied to category F1 products only.⁷⁰

68. Chris Kemp of the National Fire Chiefs Council told us his understanding of where the 5kg rule had come from, and its original intended purpose, was somewhat different. He told us it had come from the Explosives Act 1875 and had been intended to apply to “people storing gunpowder for personal use”. He agreed, however, that it was “time for an update”, confirming that, “What it meant is that we now have a situation whereby shops store just under the 5 kg threshold and sell them at the prescribed periods of time. For me, that is not what the 5 kg rule was for.”⁷¹

69. We’re concerned that the 5kg storage rule is open to misinterpretation, which may have the result of unlicensed retailers selling consumer fireworks all year round. We believe this is clearly against the spirit and intention of the Regulations and may be contributing to increased misuse of fireworks, where they are being sold by people without the proper licence or training. We recommend the Government take action as soon as possible, and at the latest by April 2020, to clarify the 5kg storage rule by amending the relevant Regulations to explicitly state it applies to low hazard category F1 fireworks only.

“Family-friendly” packaging

70. In our research into fireworks retailing, we were struck by how many consumer fireworks seemed to be packaged to appeal to children. Many had the appearance of toys, for example the “Funky Frog”, the “Alien Surprise Fountain” and examples which looked like toy cars or had “Minions” on the packaging:

69 Association of Convenience Stores supplementary written evidence ([FWS0363](#))

70 [Q120](#); see chapter one for a description of the different categories of fireworks: F1; F2; F3; and F4

71 [Qq 203–4](#)

Figure 1: Examples of fireworks packaging⁷²

71. We are concerned that age-restricted products should be packaged in this way. We worried that it could encourage under-age sales. We also felt there was a risk that children would be attracted to these products if stored in the home, which could risk safety. Our fears were not allayed by our Education Service’s survey of school students, in which 28% said they had used, played with or carried a firework without an adult present and 21% said that fireworks were sometimes kept in their home.⁷³

72. Witnesses for the fireworks industry denied that these types of product were packaged to appeal to children. Steve Raper told us they were strikingly packaged to “attract the eye”. He claimed there was no problem with underage sales, therefore “it does not matter how appealing it is to a five-year-old because a five-year-old cannot buy it.” He emphasised that fireworks were rarely bought on impulse and that:

It takes an adult to complete the purchase. The adult would buy that firework if it was in rainbow colours, as we see there for the Minion, or if it was in a brown plain wrapper.⁷⁴

Fraser Stevenson emphasised that fireworks tended to be bought for family events, and the packaging reflected that; the packaging was not an attempt to appeal directly to children.⁷⁵

73. Rachel Hallam confirmed, from her experience in Worcestershire, there was no evidence of a widespread under-age sales problem.⁷⁶ Pressed on whether storing these products in the home presented a risk, Liz Vann of the Chartered Institute of Environmental health offered a personal view that it did. She felt it was therefore something that “may need to be looked at”.⁷⁷ Dr Paul Logan, Director of the Chemicals, Explosives and Biological Hazards Division at the Health and Safety Executive, observed that an obvious flaw with the age-restriction:

[...] would inevitably be that, once you get them home, we do not really have control over how they are going to be used in a household. We expect parents to be responsible.⁷⁸

74. We accept that there is no evidence of a widespread problem with underage sales of fireworks from legitimate retailers. However, evidence from the fireworks industry and regulatory bodies did not entirely allay our concerns about packaging which may

72 The “Funky Frog” and “Alien Surprise Fountain” available online, including via www.brightstaruk.com; the “Hummer” and the “Minion” available online, including via www.fireworkscrazy.co.uk

73 See Annex E: Survey of school students, July 2019

74 [Q85](#)

75 [Q86](#)

76 [Qq 122–5](#)

77 [Q127](#)

78 [Q128](#)

appeal to children. We remain concerned that where fireworks are packaged in this way, it creates a risk that children may be tempted to play or tamper with potentially dangerous products stored in the home. *We recommend the Government take steps to ensure that these age-restricted products are not packaged in a way which is designed to appeal to children and that it introduce appropriate Regulations as soon as possible, and at the latest by November 2020.*

Raising awareness of the effects of fireworks

75. As discussed in chapter 2, the preferred solution of people who are disproportionately badly affected by fireworks, such as people with a range of health conditions and disabilities and people suffering with PTSD, tended to be a ban on public sales and use. However, people in these groups also felt that high profile, national awareness-raising campaigns could also be part of the solution.⁷⁹

76. The fireworks industry, through the British Fireworks Association, publishes an updated version of the Fireworks Code. It includes practical advice, which many people will be aware of, about storing and handling fireworks. It also encourages fireworks users to “be considerate. Let your neighbours know you will be having a display”. Steve Raper, Vice Chairman of the British Fireworks Association, emphasised that these messages were “hammered into” young people at school in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸⁰

77. There was a view, across a range of witnesses on all sides of the debate, that this simply wasn’t the case anymore. Written submissions from members of the public referred to public information films in previous decades being an important part of public awareness around safe and responsible use of fireworks. There was a perception that a lack of similar awareness campaigns today was one reason for an increase in inconsiderate or irresponsible use of fireworks. Chris Kemp of the National Fire Chiefs Council, believed that the campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s had a positive effect, and called for a renewed and “joined-up” cross-agency approach.⁸¹

78. There is very clear evidence that loud unexpected noise from fireworks has severe and distressing effects on people with a range of health conditions and disabilities, including military veterans and others suffering with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), children with autistic spectrum disorders and people with hyperacusis and other hearing conditions. It’s not good enough for the Government to repeatedly claim that the law protects these people from harm. It doesn’t. We agree with military veterans and people with health conditions and disabilities that inconsiderate and irresponsible use of fireworks needs to be considered as socially unacceptable as drink driving. If people are going to use fireworks, they must let their neighbours know in advance, so that people can take steps to protect themselves if they need to. We recommend the Government fund and coordinate a major, national awareness campaign on the responsible use of fireworks to get this message across to the public. The

79 See Annex B: Summary of public engagement with military veterans and Annex C: Summary of public engagement event with people with disabilities and health conditions

80 [Q51](#)

81 [Q190](#) [Chris Kemp]; see also, [Q165](#) [Claire McParland]; Mrs Debbie Willmot ([FWS0124](#)); Stuart Willmot ([FWS0140](#)); Stuart Walsh ([FWS0198](#)); Mrs Kate Over ([FWS0244](#)); Mr Timothy Atkinson ([FWS0276](#))

campaign should run across national mainstream and social media, and in all schools, from October 2020 and annually thereafter and should include explicit information on the impact which fireworks can have on veterans and those with PTSD.

5 Conclusion

79. E-petitions calling for greater restrictions on sales and use of fireworks have been motivated by people's genuine concerns and, in many cases, substantial distress and harm they have suffered. We have heard about the appalling effects inconsiderate or irresponsible use of fireworks can have on animals and people, who deserve a determined effort across the relevant agencies to reduce the risks.

80. The most popular petitions have called for a ban on public sales and use, with support from hundreds of thousands of people. The call for this drastic action in recent years may have been motivated by the Government's repeated complacent and dismissive responses to people's concerns. While we do not support a ban on public sales and use of fireworks at this time, further inaction from Government and agencies could mean that it becomes the only option to reduce the harm caused by the misuse of fireworks.

81. Through better monitoring and increased public awareness of the harms caused by the misuse of fireworks, greater regulation of the marketing and sales of fireworks, and more protections for those most impacted, we have offered the Government reasonable and workable recommendations, on which we expect action rather than continued apathy. People rightly expect the Government to listen to them and take their concerns seriously. The Government's response to this Report is its chance to finally do that.

Conclusions and recommendations

The practical implications of a ban on public sales and use

1. We have listened carefully to concerns about banning public sales and use of fireworks. There are valid concerns about the likely effects on community groups and their local fund-raising efforts. For some groups, for example in Sussex, community-run, non-professional displays form an important part of an area's unique culture and identity. There are also genuine concerns about the likely ineffectiveness of a ban, including some evidence from overseas that a ban could have unintended and counter-productive consequences for public safety. A ban on public sales would have a substantial economic effect, which would be most keenly felt by people who have built their livelihoods on the fireworks industry. (Paragraph 23)
2. While people who want to ban the public from buying and using fireworks have valid concerns that must be addressed, we cannot support a ban before other, less drastic but potentially more effective, options have been fully explored. (Paragraph 24)

Assessing the extent of problems and empowering effective local responses

3. Loud and high-pitched noises can adversely affect a large proportion of animals, whose hearing is often much more sensitive than humans'. They can cause substantial distress and lead to longer-term phobias and behavioural issues. In the light of this evidence, we believe the decibel level limit of consumer fireworks needs to be looked at again, with animal welfare in mind. We recommend the Government lead a review, working with animal welfare experts and the fireworks industry, of the effects of fireworks noise on animal welfare, with a view to setting a workable reduced maximum decibel limit which would diminish the risks to animal health. *Loud and high-pitched noises can adversely affect a large proportion of animals, whose hearing is often much more sensitive than humans'. They can cause substantial distress and lead to longer-term phobias and behavioural issues. In the light of this evidence, we believe the decibel level limit of consumer fireworks needs to be looked at again, with animal welfare in mind. We recommend the Government lead a review, working with animal welfare experts and the fireworks industry, of the effects of fireworks noise on animal welfare, with a view to setting a workable reduced maximum decibel limit which would diminish the risks to animal health.* (Paragraph 33)
4. The current law does not offer people and animals enough protection from frequent disturbance by fireworks, particularly where there are numerous public and domestic displays around the traditional and religious dates and a growing number of displays at other celebratory events like birthdays and weddings. We believe local authorities should be empowered to limit the number of displays in their areas in these circumstances. We recommend the Government work with local authorities to identify a best practice approach to a revenue-neutral, mandatory permit system for fireworks displays, where local evidence suggests this is necessary to protect the community. The Government should work with a local authority to pilot the approach before the end of 2020, with a view to legislating to empower

all local authorities to establish mandatory permit schemes where they deem it necessary. *The current law does not offer people and animals enough protection from frequent disturbance by fireworks, particularly where there are numerous public and domestic displays around the traditional and religious dates and a growing number of displays at other celebratory events like birthdays and weddings. We believe local authorities should be empowered to limit the number of displays in their areas in these circumstances. We recommend the Government work with local authorities to identify a best practice approach to a revenue-neutral, mandatory permit system for fireworks displays, where local evidence suggests this is necessary to protect the community. The Government should work with a local authority to pilot the approach before the end of 2020, with a view to legislating to empower all local authorities to establish mandatory permit schemes where they deem it necessary.* (Paragraph 41)

5. Any attack on emergency services workers is entirely unacceptable. It's therefore hugely worrying that these attacks appear to be on the increase, and we welcome recent measures set out in the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 to tackle the broader issue. There is evidence that attacks involving fireworks make up a significant proportion of these incidents in some parts of the country, but we are concerned they are not being consistently recorded and published. Without complete and accurate data, it is not possible to understand the extent of the problem or take steps to rectify it through properly informed local decisions. We recommend the Government work with emergency services across the country to ensure that such incidents involving fireworks are specifically and consistently recorded across all local emergency services, and the data made publicly available. *Any attack on emergency services workers is entirely unacceptable. It's therefore hugely worrying that these attacks appear to be on the increase, and we welcome recent measures set out in the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 to tackle the broader issue. There is evidence that attacks involving fireworks make up a significant proportion of these incidents in some parts of the country, but we are concerned they are not being consistently recorded and published. Without complete and accurate data, it is not possible to understand the extent of the problem or take steps to rectify it through properly informed local decisions. We recommend the Government work with emergency services across the country to ensure that such incidents involving fireworks are specifically and consistently recorded across all local emergency services, and the data made publicly available.* (Paragraph 46)
6. Fireworks are inherently transient, and, once they have been used, there may be little evidence of where or when they were set off. It's therefore inevitable that any rule about who can set off fireworks, and where and when they can be used, will be difficult to enforce. People are aware of this, including those who misuse fireworks and those for whom fireworks cause significant problems. It is likely that this is suppressing the number of complaints, meaning the real level of concern is under-reported. (Paragraph 56)
7. We believe the first step towards addressing people's valid concerns about misuse of fireworks should be improving the collection and publication of data about the types and extent of problems associated with fireworks. While the challenges of enforcement are widely acknowledged, people must be enabled, and encouraged, to make their concerns known. It must be made clear to people how and to whom

to report concerns. We recommend the Government work with local authorities and police and fire services to review the systems in place for people to report concerns about misuse of fireworks, including breaches of the night-time curfew, use of fireworks in inappropriately small domestic gardens and other anti-social behaviour, with a view to establishing a consistent approach to data collection and publication. Local authorities must have systems in place to record incidents of concern to their residents. It is vital that local areas collect this information to inform local responses. We expect the Government to issue guidance to this effect before October 2020. *We believe the first step towards addressing people's valid concerns about misuse of fireworks should be improving the collection and publication of data about the types and extent of problems associated with fireworks. While the challenges of enforcement are widely acknowledged, people must be enabled, and encouraged, to make their concerns known. It must be made clear to people how and to whom to report concerns. We recommend the Government work with local authorities and police and fire services to review the systems in place for people to report concerns about misuse of fireworks, including breaches of the night-time curfew, use of fireworks in inappropriately small domestic gardens and other anti-social behaviour, with a view to establishing a consistent approach to data collection and publication. Local authorities must have systems in place to record incidents of concern to their residents. It is vital that local areas collect this information to inform local responses. We expect the Government to issue guidance to this effect before October 2020.* (Paragraph 57)

Sales, packaging and public awareness

8. We are concerned about reports of illegal sales of fireworks online, particularly over social media. It's imperative that consumer fireworks are only sold to the public through legitimate retailers with the appropriate licences and staff with the appropriate level of training to advise customers about safe and responsible use. It appears local authority Trading Standards teams lack the necessary skills and resources to address illegal online sales effectively. We recommend the Government conduct a review of online sales of fireworks, with a particular focus on sales via social media, with a view to establishing a national, cross-agency strategy to tackle the problem. The strategy should include measures to exert pressure on social media companies to identify and remove posts advertising unlicensed or illegal fireworks for sale on their platforms. We recommended this review be conducted, and a strategy published, before October 2020. *We are concerned about reports of illegal sales of fireworks online, particularly over social media. It's imperative that consumer fireworks are only sold to the public through legitimate retailers with the appropriate licences and staff with the appropriate level of training to advise customers about safe and responsible use. It appears local authority Trading Standards teams lack the necessary skills and resources to address illegal online sales effectively. We recommend the Government conduct a review of online sales of fireworks, with a particular focus on sales via social media, with a view to establishing a national, cross-agency strategy to tackle the problem. The strategy should include measures to exert pressure on social media companies to identify and remove posts advertising unlicensed or illegal fireworks for sale on their platforms. We recommended this review be conducted, and a strategy published, before October 2020.* (Paragraph 63)

9. We're concerned that the 5kg storage rule is open to misinterpretation, which may have the result of unlicensed retailers selling consumer fireworks all year round. We believe this is clearly against the spirit and intention of the Regulations and may be contributing to increased misuse of fireworks, where they are being sold by people without the proper licence or training. We recommend the Government take action as soon as possible, and at the latest by April 2020, to clarify the 5kg storage rule by amending the relevant Regulations to explicitly state it applies to low hazard category F1 fireworks only.*We're concerned that the 5kg storage rule is open to misinterpretation, which may have the result of unlicensed retailers selling consumer fireworks all year round. We believe this is clearly against the spirit and intention of the Regulations and may be contributing to increased misuse of fireworks, where they are being sold by people without the proper licence or training. We recommend the Government take action as soon as possible, and at the latest by April 2020, to clarify the 5kg storage rule by amending the relevant Regulations to explicitly state it applies to low hazard category F1 fireworks only.* (Paragraph 69)

10. We accept that there is no evidence of a widespread problem with underage sales of fireworks from legitimate retailers. However, evidence from the fireworks industry and regulatory bodies did not entirely allay our concerns about packaging which may appeal to children. We remain concerned that where fireworks are packaged in this way, it creates a risk that children may be tempted to play or tamper with potentially dangerous products stored in the home. We recommend the Government take steps to ensure that these age-restricted products are not packaged in a way which is designed to appeal to children and that it introduce appropriate Regulations as soon as possible, and at the latest by November 2020.*We accept that there is no evidence of a widespread problem with underage sales of fireworks from legitimate retailers. However, evidence from the fireworks industry and regulatory bodies did not entirely allay our concerns about packaging which may appeal to children. We remain concerned that where fireworks are packaged in this way, it creates a risk that children may be tempted to play or tamper with potentially dangerous products stored in the home. We recommend the Government take steps to ensure that these age-restricted products are not packaged in a way which is designed to appeal to children and that it introduce appropriate Regulations as soon as possible, and at the latest by November 2020.* (Paragraph 74)

11. There is very clear evidence that loud unexpected noise from fireworks has severe and distressing effects on people with a range of health conditions and disabilities, including military veterans and others suffering with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), children with autistic spectrum disorders and people with hyperacusis and other hearing conditions. It's not good enough for the Government to repeatedly claim that the law protects these people from harm. It doesn't. We agree with military veterans and people with health conditions and disabilities that inconsiderate and irresponsible use of fireworks needs to be considered as socially unacceptable as drink driving. If people are going to use fireworks, they must let their neighbours know in advance, so that people can take steps to protect themselves if they need to. We recommend the Government fund and coordinate a major, national awareness campaign on the responsible use of fireworks to get this message across to the public. The campaign should run across national mainstream and social media, and in all schools, from October 2020 and annually thereafter and should include

explicit information on the impact which fireworks can have on veterans and those with PTSD. *There is very clear evidence that loud unexpected noise from fireworks has severe and distressing effects on people with a range of health conditions and disabilities, including military veterans and others suffering with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), children with autistic spectrum disorders and people with hyperacusis and other hearing conditions. It's not good enough for the Government to repeatedly claim that the law protects these people from harm. It doesn't. We agree with military veterans and people with health conditions and disabilities that inconsiderate and irresponsible use of fireworks needs to be considered as socially unacceptable as drink driving. If people are going to use fireworks, they must let their neighbours know in advance, so that people can take steps to protect themselves if they need to. We recommend the Government fund and coordinate a major, national awareness campaign on the responsible use of fireworks to get this message across to the public. The campaign should run across national mainstream and social media, and in all schools, from October 2020 and annually thereafter and should include explicit information on the impact which fireworks can have on veterans and those with PTSD. (Paragraph 78)*

Annex A: Summary of survey results

We launched our survey on 27 February. A link to the survey was emailed to everyone who had signed one of 11 open petitions about regulation of fireworks and had consented to be contacted.

By far the most popular of these petitions was the first listed below, calling for a ban on sales to the public, which had around 300,000 signatures (the second most popular petition, calling for firework sales to the general public to be restricted to “quiet fireworks”, had only around 1,000 signatures).

- **Ban the sale of fireworks to the public. Displays for licenced venues only** ([e-petition 231147](#))
- **Pass a law that only allows the sale of Quiet Fireworks to the general public** ([e-petition 232038](#))
- **Change the laws for fireworks only to use silent fireworks** ([e-petition 231604](#))
- **NOT to ban the sale of fireworks to the public** ([e-petition 232242](#))
- **Increase firework restrictions to prevent use during daytime** ([e-petition 232109](#))
- **Full ban on the purchase of fireworks & displays** ([e-petition 231962](#))
- **Create a permit system for garden fireworks and when they can be used** ([e-petition 231965](#))
- **Raise the age of sale, of fireworks, to the general public from 18 to 25** ([e-petition 231437](#))
- **Ban Fireworks that are toxic to both the environment and humans!** ([e-petition 231806](#))
- **Stop firework work displays on armistice Sunday** ([e-petition 232653](#))
- **Fireworks should only be sold in registered gun shops** ([e-petition 232653](#))

The survey closed on 26 March. **There were 63,076 responses in total (20,447 partial responses and 42,629 complete responses).**

Key themes

- A large majority of respondents were **primarily concerned about the effects of fireworks on animals** and, within this group, a large majority were members of the public concerned about the effects on pets and domestic animals
- Owners of dogs were by far the largest group of pet owners
- Unsurprisingly, given the population of people surveyed, a large majority of respondents supported a ban on public sale and use

- However, a **significant minority of respondents, including some in the fireworks industry, supported compromise solutions, short of a ban**, including:
- **Raising age restrictions** on sales to the public
- Further **restrictions on the specifications of fireworks** available for sale to the public
- A new **permit system for displays**
- **Greater restrictions on types of retailer permitted to sell fireworks** e.g. specialist fireworks retailers only
- Respondents had a **reasonably good understanding of current fireworks laws**, though there were significant areas of misunderstanding, for example about available sentences for fireworks offences
- Many **fireworks professionals believed the current Regulations were adequate but were not being enforced effectively**
- However, many other respondents believed the **current laws were unenforceable**
- Many believed the police and local authority Trading Standards and Environmental Health Officers **lacked the resources to enforce current laws** effectively
- Respondents in a range of categories believed modern fireworks were **unnecessarily loud** (many said the current 120Db limit was too high; there was considerable support for quieter or “silent” fireworks)
- Fireworks were very **problematic for people with a wide range of disabilities**
- Dozens of military veterans and their families reported that fireworks were problematic, for example exacerbating symptoms of **Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
- Organised, public displays were relatively manageable for people for whom fireworks were problematic
- Whereas **private displays were less predictable and often impossible to mitigate against**
- **Anti-social behaviour** was a significant concern, and many respondents believed the authorities lacked the time and resources to deal with it effectively
- Many respondents objected to **fireworks being set off all year round**, rather than on only a handful of days each year
- **A majority of those who did not support change to current laws said that fireworks were culturally important to them.**

“Quiz” on current laws

The first section of the survey was designed to test respondents’ knowledge and understanding of the following current rules:

- Outdoor fireworks, including sparklers, can only be sold to people aged 18 years and over.
- It’s against the law to sell very powerful fireworks designed for use in large open spaces to the general public.
- It’s illegal to set off fireworks between 11pm and 7am except during four times of the year.
- Those four times are: New Year’s Eve; Chinese New Year; Diwali; and bonfire night.
- The maximum sentence for selling or using fireworks illegally is 6 months in prison.

Respondents’ knowledge and understanding of these rules was mixed. For example, large majorities were aware of special rules in place for each of the four protected festivals. A very large majority were aware of the night time restrictions. There was relatively poor awareness of the penalties for fireworks misuse.

The quiz asked:

1. How old do you have to be to buy outdoor sparklers? **

About half of respondents answered correctly that people had to be 18 years or older to buy outdoor sparklers. Around 40% believed the age requirement was at least 16 years. Less than 10% thought people had to be at least 21 years old to buy outdoor sparklers:

2. True or false? It’s against the law to sell very powerful fireworks designed for use in large open spaces to the general public. **

A small majority of people (57%) believed this statement to be true; 43% answered that it was false.

****Note on questions 1 and 2 of the survey:**

Several survey respondents, particularly those working in the fireworks industry who had a detailed understanding of the relevant Regulations, told us that questions 1 and 2 were potentially ambiguous.

The “quiz” questions were intended to assess the public’s broad understanding of the rules. They were posed in simple language and in such a way as not to presuppose a detailed understanding of the Regulations and the technical specifications of the different categories of fireworks.

By “outdoor sparklers” in question 1, we meant category F2, intended for use in confined outside areas (e.g. domestic gardens). The Regulations are clear that people must be at least 18 years old to buy F2 fireworks, including sparklers.

By “very powerful fireworks designed for use in large outdoor spaces” in question 2, we meant the most powerful category, F4 fireworks, which the relevant Regulations state are intended for use by people with specialist knowledge only.

3. There are special rules for fireworks during four festivals every year. Which four festivals?

- New Year’s Eve
- Halloween
- The Queen’s birthday
- Diwali
- Chinese New Year
- Bonfire Night/Guy Fawkes’ Night
- St. George’s Day

Most people understood there were special rules in relation to New Year’s Eve (75% of respondents), Bonfire Night/Guy Fawkes (71%), Chinese New Year (69%) and Diwali (66%).

However, a significant proportion of people wrongly believed there were also special rules in place for the Queen’s Birthday (34%), Halloween (18%) and St. George’s Day (17%).

4. True or false? Other than those four festivals, it’s illegal to set off fireworks between 11pm and 7am.

81% of respondents answered correctly that this statement was true; 19% wrongly believed it was false.

5. What’s the maximum prison sentence for selling or using fireworks illegally?

- No prison sentence
- 3 months
- 6 months
- 12 months
- More than 12 months

A small majority of respondents (53%) incorrectly believed there was no prison sentence for selling or using fireworks illegally. Only 18% of respondents answered correctly that the maximum sentence was six months in prison.

Views on the Government’s position and key concerns

We wanted to know what respondents thought of the Government’s view that current Regulations provide a good balance between people’s rights to enjoy fireworks and protecting people, animals and property from harm.

The survey presented four options and asked respondents which best described their opinion:

- I don't believe that fireworks are a problem
- I support an outright ban on members of the public buying and using fireworks
- It should be harder to buy and use fireworks, but they shouldn't be banned
- I don't believe the current law is being enforced

Unsurprisingly, given the population surveyed, a large majority of respondents (74%) supported an outright ban on public sale and use. However, a significant minority of respondents (14%) believed enforcement of the current law was the main concern. 10% of respondents supported greater restrictions (short of an outright ban) on sale and use. Only 2% of respondents believed there was no problem with the current rules.

The survey asked respondents to choose the category which best described them:

- I'm concerned about the effects of fireworks on animals and the environment;
- effects on children;
- effects on people who are particularly sensitive to noise or explosions;
- concerned about anti-social behaviour;
- I'm a member or ex-member of the emergency services or medical profession;
- a fireworks professional (pyrotechnics or events); or
- a fireworks professional (insurance; local authority; trading standards; or health and safety).
- Other

A large majority of respondents (70%) identified as being principally concerned about the effects of fireworks on animals and the environment. The next largest group (11%) identified as being primarily concerned about anti-social behaviour. The remaining categories were each chosen by fewer than 5% of respondents.

Concerns specified by the nearly 10% of respondents who chose the "other" category included:

- People broadly concerned about safety risks, particularly those who had been injured by fireworks;
- People particularly concerned about elderly people and those with dementia;
- People whose property had suffered damage;
- People concerned about the use, or potential use, of fireworks for violence or terrorism;

- People whose primary concern was that fireworks are set off all year round and no longer limited to a couple of special occasions per year; and
- Many respondents reported being affected by fireworks in several of the ways listed and felt unable to choose a primary concern.

Breakdown by category of respondent

1. Concerned about animals and the environment

Of those who described themselves as most concerned about the effects of fireworks on animals and the environment (29,402 respondents, 70% of respondents who chose a category) we asked which of the following best described them:

- I work with animals in an animal-related business (e.g. zoo, equestrian, pet boarding);
- I work directly with wildlife (e.g. conservation worker, ranger);
- I'm a veterinary surgeon/nurse or work in animal welfare e.g. rescue centre;
- I'm a member of the public concerned about wildlife and the environment;
- I'm a member of the public concerned about pets/domestic animals.
- Other

A majority (67%) of respondents principally concerned about animals or the environment identified themselves as members of the public concerned about pets/domestic animals. The next largest category (17%) was those who described themselves as members of the public concerned about wildlife and the environment. 8% of those concerned about animals and the environment identified as working in an animal-related business. Wildlife and veterinary/animal welfare workers accounted for less than 2% of all respondents who were concerned about animals and the environment.

As with the broader question about people's main concern about fireworks, many of the 6% of respondents in the animals/environment group who chose the "other" category reported that more than one category applied to them and they were concerned about all animals, whether pets, domesticated or wildlife. Several respondents in the "other" category identified as Guide Dog owners.

We asked respondents concerned about the effects of fireworks on animals they cared for, how often their animals were affected. An overwhelming majority (94%) said their animals were affected several times a year or more frequently.

Summary of free text comments from respondents who identified as primarily concerned about animals and the environment

Owners of pets and domesticated animals

As noted above, by far the largest category of respondents was owners of pets and domesticated animals. 19,676 commented in the free-text box provided. **By far the most common responses were in relation to the effects on pet dogs.** There were thousands of similar descriptions. These examples were typical:

“I have 2 dogs, one of which doesn’t bother about fireworks, and another that is terrified. The noise of fireworks causes him a high amount of distress and anxiety—to the point where he won’t eat and can barely sleep. It’s not fair for helpless animals to have to go through this.”

“In our experience of owning 6 dogs over different periods, dogs are absolutely petrified of fireworks. The fear is beyond anything I see in the dogs at any other time. They cry, cower away, whimper, chew through power cables and rugs, etc.”

“My dog is terrified of fireworks, every year he has to take diazepam plus many other ‘aids’ to relax him during the fireworks just to calm him down which don’t work, he gets extremely stressed to the point he will be sick.”

“My poor dog suffers terribly, and it does not put stress just on her but me and my partner. It makes her hysterical and she messes everywhere with being so frightened.”

Workers in animal-related businesses

People who worked in a range of animal-related businesses reported that it was not possible to fully mitigate the effects of fireworks on their animals. A substantial proportion of responses were from people who worked in pet boarding and equestrian businesses. **People described both the financial and emotional costs.** For example:

“When fireworks are set off for long periods of time (6 weeks every year) my horses become sick. They have colic through stress and then suffer weeks of costly gut ulcer management. This can make horses dangerous to handle for weeks and weeks. Every year I have up to £1000 worth of drug and vet bills at this time. Starts end of September and goes on to March. When they are panicked I have to spend endless evenings out with them in the cold trying to ensure they don’t jump thru fencing and onto highways.”

“I work in a kennels and cattery, the fireworks absolutely scare our animals to the maximum, they have no where they can try and escape to hide in a kennel or cattery. We try our best to provide radios, shut all doors so the building is as sound proof as it possibly can be, however there’s so many going off in so many directions I think it’s getting stupid now. It starts from bonfire night and goes all the way up to New Years, every single night there’s at least one firework go off no matter what day it is.”

“I’m in the Equestrian industry, and for a flight or fight animal, loud explosions (for want of a better word) going off every night for up to 4 weeks at a time at all hours of the night is absolutely terrifying. In some horses (especially the more nervous), this can cause injury or illness, leading to large vet bills and great emotional and financial distress.”

“I lost a much-loved competition horse who was so traumatised by a private fireworks party held unannounced next to his yard that it triggered colic. We spent £10,000 trying to save him but he was beyond hope. I had invested 15 years of hard work into his competition training. His value was £25,000 plus the emotional attachment I had to him. That one fireworks party cost me £35,000 in losses and an immeasurable amount emotionally.”

“I manage a yard of 40 horses in surrey, between Halloween and New Year’s we have firework displays at people’s houses local to the farm every weekend. It is very shocking to the horses who cannot see what’s causing these sudden explosions. If it was just one night we could manage the horses and sedate those particularly stressed by fireworks but it’s multiple nights and multiple displays that are incredibly close to our farm.”

“They frighten animals, we have had horses go through barbed wire fences.”

There were also reports of serious injuries to farm animals, for example:

“The injuries I have seen caused to livestock; aborting foals, calves, lambs, running in blind panic through fencing with often fatal injuries and just sheer distress of animals when fireworks are let off in gardens adjacent to fields and farmland.”

Conservation workers

There were relatively few responses from conservation workers and others concerned about wildlife. Typically, the primary concern was about the effects on birds and their nesting sites. Some reported concerns about the effects on a wider range of wildlife:

“Wildlife find fireworks incredibly alarming. They often disturb the roosts of thousands of birds such as starlings causing them to fly off in panic and often end up colliding with buildings/cars. They startle larger animals such as deer which can be a hazard for people in vehicles. They may cause parent animals to abandon their young through fear [...]”

Veterinary surgeons/nurses/animal rescue centres

Veterinary and animal rescue professionals and volunteers described injuries to animals including birds, dogs and wildlife:

“[...] birds crash into buildings especially glass windows, nesting birds are abandoned [...]”

“I work as a veterinary nurse. Last year I was a night nurse and the whole week on firework night leading up to new year I had animals come in in horrible states.”

“3 dogs had anxiety seizures. 2 of which were euthanised as they were in such a bad state and couldn’t come out of it.”

“I run a wildlife rescue charity, and despite our best effort to limit the effects of the fireworks on the nights we are expecting them, we usually lose a handful of patients directly as a result of fireworks in the neighbourhood. [...] Wildlife is prone to a condition brought on by the stresses of captivity, (Rhabdomyolysis) and we work tirelessly to limit this, as it is nearly always fatal. This is the condition that fireworks cause; as the sudden shock of the explosions and lights in conjunction with the inability to escape (usually due to the injury for which the creature was admitted to us), instantly releases the chemicals that start this process. We can only attempt to protect against it when we are aware of local firework displays.”

2. Effects of fireworks on children

We asked those respondents who identified themselves as primarily concerned about the effects of fireworks on children (1,127 respondents, less than 3% of respondents who chose a category) which of the following best described them:

- I’m concerned about effects on children I’m close to e.g. I’m a parent/guardian/carer;
- I’m a teacher or other school worker;
- I’m a youth worker or work with children in youth organisations e.g. sports clubs, scouts

A large majority (80%) of those primarily concerned about the effects of fireworks on children identified as parents/guardians/carers. Of the remainder the largest category was “other” (13%), with respondents in this category identifying as extended family members or merely concerned members of the public. 6% identified as teachers or school workers. Less than 2% identified as youth workers or involved in youth groups.

We asked people concerned about the effects of fireworks on children what was their main concern about fireworks:

- effects on children’s sleep;
- that fireworks frighten children;
- concern about children with specific needs, such as those with autism or learning, sensory or developmental disabilities;
- or concerned that fireworks were dangerous.
- other

A majority (66%) were concerned that fireworks were dangerous for children. The remainder of respondents were quite equally spread between concerns about sleep, children being frightened and children with specific needs (each around 10%).

Those who chose the “other” category (50 respondents) typically identified as a member of a child/children’s extended family or a member of the public concerned about the welfare of children generally.

Summary of free text comments by respondents who identified as being predominately concerned about the effects of fireworks on children:

Dangers of fireworks to children

Despite the high level of concern about the danger of fireworks to children, **there were few reports of actual injuries.** Those that were described were very distressing, however, for example:

“Our son was hit by a firework last year, he was 22 months old at the time. This was a firework sold to us by a large supermarket chain, one that shoots colour bursts, not a rocket. We secured it as per the instructions and it fired from the side instead of the top, straight into my son’s hand (he was a good 10+ metres away). He has suffered deep burns to the whole of his palm and fingers, it took over a month for the wounds to ‘heal’ and now has thick scarring on his palm. He has to have cream/silicone gel applied several times a day and is now at risk of this causing him long term damage and restricting the use of his hand/fingers.”

Many respondents reported being aware of local children being hurt by fireworks but without giving specific details. There were also many descriptions of “close calls” in which children were nearly hurt by fireworks.

Effects on children’s sleep

Many respondents described the effects of fireworks set off at night on children’s and babies’ sleep. For example:

“During bonfire night and New Year’s Eve my house was like being in a war zone. Fireworks were going off outside the windows until 2-3am. My baby (who was four months!) could not sleep due to the extreme noise and lights.”

“My youngest daughter is in tears before going to school during the bonfire night season (because it lasts 3 weeks here) because she is so exhausted after constant disruption to her sleep. The current laws are not being enforced as we have them going off at 2am sometimes which is massively anxiety inducing and unfair.”

Children being frightened

“[...] the noise of them is so debilitating to my 2 year old son, to the point he bites his fingers until they bleed, he tries to smother himself and is in constant fear with each loud bang.”

“We have a young son who was terrified and wouldn’t sleep in his own bed for weeks because he was so frightened by the loud bangs. Every night we would put him to sleep at 7pm and then have screaming hell until midnight because he was terrified of the noise that continuously wakes him up. He has suffered night terrors as a result of this.”

“Nearly 4 months after bonfire night and my 2 year-old still goes to bed scared of fireworks. Her sleep was severely disrupted for months and the impact of this on our family has been awful. Fireworks go off pretty much every night before 5th Nov up to and beyond new year. It’s too much and constant fear in my daughter is unnecessary and very hard for her to cope with emotionally.”

Effects on children with special needs such as autism and learning, sensory and developmental disabilities

Several parents of children with autism and other complex needs reported the effects of fireworks. For example:

“[...] our son has severe complex needs including epilepsy, which can cause him to stop breathing. Loud, unexpected noises are often a trigger for this. We don’t very often take him to displays, but if we do he wears ear defenders, and we stand a safe distance away from the fireworks, sometimes choosing to stand far enough away so they aren’t as loud. Sadly at home where he should be safe and protected, members of the public are able to set fireworks off at any time, in the street or in their gardens, the laws are not enforced and we cannot guarantee how loud they are going to be due to the proximity to our home. As lovely as it is to see fireworks on new year’s Eve etc ... My son screams, has a seizure and has to be administered oxygen. This is distressing for all involved.”

“My nephew has autism and hearing fireworks triggers meltdowns for him. He screams and screams. It surprises me that more people don’t understand this [...].”

3. Effects on people sensitive to noise or explosions

We asked those respondents who identified themselves as primarily concerned about the effects of fireworks on people who are sensitive to noise and explosions (1,721 respondents, just over 4% of all respondents) whether they would still want greater restrictions on the sale and use of fireworks if all fireworks were quieter: 60% said yes, they would still want greater restrictions; 26% said no; and 14% answered “don’t know”.

We asked respondents whose primary concern was people who were sensitive to noise or explosions which of the following categories best described them:

- I've had or someone close to me has had a traumatic experience/s involving loud noises or explosions;
- I am or someone close to me is a veteran;
- I am or someone close to me is on the autistic spectrum or has specific needs such as a learning, sensory or developmental disability.
- other

Of those who chose a category, 618 respondents (36%) said they or someone close to them had had a traumatic experiences/s, which meant they could not enjoy fireworks; a similar proportion (34%, 593 respondents) said they or someone close to them was on the autistic spectrum or had other special needs; 11% (198 respondents) said they or someone close to them was a veteran.

9% (102 respondents) of people who said their main concern about fireworks was the effects on people who were particularly sensitive to noise said they had been diagnosed with PTSD.

Summary of free text comments by respondents who identified as being predominately concerned about the effects of fireworks on people who are particularly sensitive to noise:

Disabilities

Many of the nearly 19% (323) respondents who chose the “other” category described a very wide range of medical conditions and disabilities that made fireworks problematic for them, for example:

- Anxiety disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Cataplexy
- Dementia
- Epilepsy
- Fibromyalgia
- Hyperacusis
- Hydrocephalus
- Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.)
- Multiple sclerosis (MS)

- Narcolepsy
- Parkinson's disease
- Tinnitus

Traumatic experiences leading to fear of fireworks

Respondents described a range of traumatic experiences leading to fear of fireworks.

Four respondents reported that they or relatives had been present at the Manchester MEN bombing and described the fearfulness fireworks now caused them. For example, one respondent wrote:

“Myself and my sister were at the MEN arena in Manchester the night of the Manchester attack (22/05/2017). The result of that night and hearing the explosion has caused us distress when it comes to fireworks, as the noise of a firework is very similar to the sound of the bomb explosion. Therefore, myself and my sister (mainly my sister (who is 13) find it difficult when there are fireworks going off.”

Several respondents reported that older relatives who had lived through bombing in the Second World War had always retained a fear of fireworks.

Other respondents reported being involved in accidents, for example exploding gas canisters and road traffic accidents:

“My brother was seriously injured in a work place explosion involving gas cylinders. Any celebrations involving fireworks render him a physical and mental wreck, this also has a deep emotional impact on his wife and three children. He dreads the run up to, during and following Bonfire night and other celebrations because members of the public use fireworks in a reckless manner and over a long period of time, usually around 4 weeks.”

Veterans

Dozens of veterans of military conflicts and their families described fireworks triggering panic attacks or symptoms of PTSD. The key theme in these responses was that, while organised public displays were generally manageable, private fireworks displays, which were less predictable and often impossible to plan for, caused significant problems. For example:

“I am a veteran and constant fireworks, which are very loud, take me back to the battlefield and have an impact on my mental health. I can't fully describe the terror the fireworks cause me. I have no problem with public organised events. However, the constant unexpected bursts of loud noise and flashes of fireworks is terrifying. I served for almost 25 years in various conflicts, I believe in people having the freedom of choice, but allowance must be made for people like me.”

“My husband, after being to Afghanistan and Iraq with the army and unfortunately being involved in an explosion with an IED, now suffers

PTSD. Majority of the time this is managed. If we are at an organised display, he is OK, prepared for the noise etc. However, when they are going off at all times of the day and night on numerous days that aren't fireworks night/new year, in his mind he is right back there in Afghanistan [...]. And then there we are all the work he has done to overcome his PTSD is undone in an instant and we are right back at square one—night terrors, withdrawn etc.”

4. Anti-social behaviour

We asked the 4,552 people who said anti-social behaviour (ASB) was their primary concern about fireworks (11% of respondents who chose a primary concern) whether the ASB they were concerned about was predominantly committed by young people. A majority (61%) answered yes; 17% said no; 22% didn't know whether ASB was predominantly committed by young people.

We asked respondents whose primary concern was ASB which of the following categories best described their reason for concern:

- Neighbours or near-neighbours have set off fireworks in their gardens, which frightens/worries me
- Neighbours or near-neighbours have set off fireworks until very late at night
- People have set off fireworks in the street near me
- I or someone close to me have been threatened with a firework
- I or someone close to me have been injured by a firework
- other

Most respondents whose primary concern was ASB were most concerned about fireworks being set off in the street (1,527 responses, 33%) or set off very late at night by neighbours or near-neighbours (1,521, 33%).

Concern about more serious ASB was relatively uncommon: 9% (426 respondents) of those primarily concerned about ASB reported having been threatened with a firework; 7% (304 respondents) reported having been injured by a firework in an ASB incident).

Summary of free text comments by respondents who identified as being predominately concerned about anti-social behaviour with fireworks

Problems with neighbours' fireworks

There were relatively few reports of more serious ASB committed by neighbours, but some examples were distressing. For example:

“I’ve actually had a group of older teenagers set fireworks off 3 foot from my bedroom window late at night. In my previous flat high school children used to open the main door to the flat and throw fireworks in.”

“The neighbour’s back garden is 3 metres away from the front of my house (semi-detached). They used commercial fireworks and these were very powerful and frightening. When we protested, they pushed and hurt another neighbour.”

There were several common themes in responses from people concerned about their neighbours’ use of fireworks:

- **insufficient space** in small residential gardens in built up areas
- neighbours using fireworks under the influence of **alcohol**
- **damage to property**
- fireworks debris **littering** gardens and streets
- **lack of consideration** by neighbours setting off fireworks in gardens, with no warnings given
- a **perception that today’s fireworks were much more powerful and louder** than they were in the past, or an **assumption that neighbours were using category F3 and F4 fireworks** intended for use in larger open areas or by specialists
- a strong perception that **current laws were unenforceable**
- **complaints not acted on** by the police or councils.

“I didn’t realise that there were actually laws in force regarding the use of fireworks—you could have fooled me. Where I live (Hackney) it’s a nightmare - if they are on sale, young people buy them and they are free to set off as many of them as they please and the Police DO NOT put a stop to it at all.”

“Near neighbours had a firework display for five hours including extremely loud fireworks which I would be surprised if they were intended for garden use. Two of those fireworks burnt holes in my conservatory roof and the lady involved denied any involvement, although the whole road and gardens around were full of firework debris, and all the neighbours were very distressed by it.”

“I have very close neighbours, who up to 4 times a year, and not on any of the festivals with special rules, have set off very large and powerful display only fireworks very close to our house, and with no warning, so that we can at least make sure our animals are not in the garden. The last time was about 1:00 am, and the time before that, the firework was just one gigantic explosion, like a bomb going off. It definitely wasn’t a domestic firework.

All the plugs come down in our garden, and could do damage to our glass roofed conservatory, but they just have no concern about anyone else's welfare."

"My next-door neighbour set off some fireworks, which should only have been used at an organised event. He nearly set fire to our house and car, he caused thousands of pounds worth of damage. The fire service and police were involved but nothing happened to him."

Fireworks set off late at night

Hundreds of respondents reported neighbours or near-neighbours setting off fireworks until very late at night outside of the four protected festivals. Many reported complaints not being acted on. There was an assumption that the police and councils lacked the resources to enforce the law.

"The laws are not being enforced at all. They usually start at Halloween then continue every night for the rest of the month. They go off at all hours from 5pm until 5am."

"The law is impossible to enforce, fireworks go off till the early hours of the morning and for longer than the specified occasions, for example bonfire night. They're going off as soon as you can buy them continuously till New Year's Eve."

"Police have told me they need to be there at the time to witness the fireworks being set off and they don't have the manpower."

"Late night use of fireworks outside of legal hours happen frequently, and in public spaces (such as on a mini roundabout in a housing estate). [...] None of the laws related to fireworks are being enforced."

"I have called the police to report the use of fireworks until the early hours of the morning, when a festival is not in place. I have been told that it is not against the law and that if I have an issue I should call environmental health regarding this. I feel I was fobbed off just so the local police force didn't have to bother with it."

Fireworks set off in the street; injuries

There were numerous reports of fireworks being set off in the street, particularly by young people. There was an assumption that shops were flouting the rules by selling fireworks to young people. There was a perception that the problem had become worse in recent years. Again, there was a strong perception that the police lack the resources to deal with the problem.

"People have set off fireworks at all times of day and night, often very late at night in the streets around where I live. Often it's young people who like to scare and annoy people who they know live alone or are scared as I hear them talking and laughing about doing this."

“Increasingly I see more people under the age of 18 (and older) using fireworks in an anti-social way. Definitely not just on the four festival dates but even recently during the evening or night. I think this is because there is no one to stop them from throwing them. I am presuming they are also buying them illegally.”

“Kids are letting them off aiming them at cars, and there is nothing the police can do to help, they can’t be everywhere at once on these nights. By the next morning the smoke still hasn’t cleared, and the neighbourhood is littered with the remnants of used fireworks.”

“A gang of teenagers set off a firework in my direction in the street on Bonfire Night around 8 years ago. It missed me thankfully but it was terrifying.”

There were some, but relatively few, reports of injuries. For example:

“My Fiancé was hit by a firework deliberately last Halloween. She had to have X-rays, and needed 9 inner and 8 outer stitches on her calf muscle.”

“I had one thrown directly into my face, causing a burnt forehead and hair.”

“I received a glancing blow from a small firework during my school lunch break. I was aged sixteen but vividly remember the, fortunately, brief sense of searing heat as the firework passed my lower leg. It had been thrown by a boy from a different school. A fine layer of my skin was burnt in a straight line and my tights had a gaping hole. I shall never forget my shock and realisation that I could have been nastily injured.”

“My best friend was struck by a firework that young people were setting off on school grounds (they were deliberately aiming for people). She needed surgery in hospital and suffered from such strong PTSD that she could never come into school for the whole month of November after the incident. Nobody was ever caught or punished for it.”

5. Emergency services workers and medical professionals

676 respondents (2%) identified themselves as current or ex-emergency services workers or medical professionals. Of those, the largest group (276 respondents) identified as current or ex-medical professionals. The next largest group were current or ex-police officers (207). 61 current or ex-firefighters and 58 current or ex-ambulance crew responded to the survey.

When asked whether they had dealt with, or been affected by, ASB involving fireworks, 81% of current or ex-emergency services or medical professional said they had.

Summary of free text comments by respondents who identified as being current or ex-emergency services workers or medical professionals

468 current or ex-emergency services or medical professionals used free-text comments to describe their experiences. Common themes were:

- **a wide range of ASB, typically committed by young people, from nuisance to arson, and reports that police lacked the resources to deal with incidents effectively**, including this comment from a serving police officer:

“Fireworks are a massive antisocial behaviour issue. They create multiple issues for the local communities and ultimately result in higher demand for service which is already stretched exceptionally thin. This is more apparent at peak times known as ‘mischievous week’ around Halloween and Bonfire night. The issues are always related to ‘groups of youths’ setting off fireworks or neighbour disputes. It’s not uncommon for the fireworks to aimed towards officers attending the scene.”

- **some emergency services respondents, however, reported that attendance at incidents involving fireworks was rare;**
- accidental fires caused by fireworks
- **some reports of emergency services being attacked with fireworks.**

“Every year fireworks are used as weapons against me and my colleagues across all emergency services. The Police are stretched enough but bonfire night for example we are having to have our days off cancelled to keep the fire service safe. I am bored of ducking fireworks that are fired at us.”

“It was Mischief night, when I got called to a fire near an electrical substation. It was in a car park next to a block of small flats with a cut through to a cul-de-sac and a road to the left. 15 males, approx 13–19 surrounded both sides and proceeded to set of fireworks directly at myself and my colleague. We proceeded to push through the crowd and run through the cut through. However, I had suffered temporary blindness and hearing loss and had suffered heat rash burns.”

- numerous reports of facial burns and eye injuries and **reports of A&E resources being stretched** by fireworks accidents

“In A&E on and around bonfire night we deal with patients suffering from multiple severe injuries including loss of sight and permanent damage to limbs. Treating patients at this time and at new year can take up to 50% of the department’s resources.”

“With an already strained NHS fireworks significantly increase the attendances in A&E departments. From minor to major treatments. There is a lot of antisocial behaviour around fireworks & extremely difficult to monitor. Incidents increase every year, and this could be prevented by having arranged displays only.”

6. Fireworks professionals

180 respondents identified themselves as fireworks professionals, either pyrotechnicians or event organisers (132 respondents) or involved in insurance, trading standards, a local

authority or health and safety (48 respondents). We asked these respondents whether there were additional fireworks restrictions they would like to see. 132 respondents used free-text comments to share their views.

There was a diverse range of views. There was significant support for a ban on the sale of fireworks to the general public. There was also support for a new licencing or permit regime for displays and stricter rules about the type of retailers permitted to sell fireworks. For example:

“They should only be available for sale to people hosting display events where you need to apply to the council for a license, this license (even if it is a fee free application) needs to be produced before fireworks from specific retailers can be sold. [...] No local shops or supermarkets should be able to sell them, no ‘joe public’ should be able to just walk into a shop and buy them.”

There was some support for raising the minimum age at which people were permitted to buy fireworks (to 21 or 25 years) and support for further restricting the decibel level and other specifications of fireworks available to the general public to buy.

However, **many fireworks professionals believed the main problem was with enforcement of the current laws.**

“I think to start with the current laws need to be enforced, this applies to misuse and also people selling either legal fireworks illegally i.e. on Facebook and other sites or other distributors in mainland Europe that allow people in the UK to buy and get delivered (sometimes by air mail packaged as something else) fireworks that are illegal here. The age limit could possibly be increased but I am not sure this will still stop the people that misuse them from getting them illegally.”

7. People who don't believe fireworks are a problem

891 people told us they did not believe fireworks were a problem. We asked this group which of these statements best described their opinion:

- I believe any problems are rare
- I think that fireworks are risky, but that's ok

688 (74%) of respondents said they believed any problems associated with fireworks were rare; 196 (22%) chose “fireworks are risky, but that's ok”.

We asked respondents who told us they did not believe fireworks were a problem to choose a category which best described them:

- Fireworks are an important part of my cultural traditions—for example, bonfire night or Chinese New Year
- Fireworks are part of my family's traditions—for example, birthday or wedding celebrations

- Fireworks play an important part in my religious celebrations

The largest group (471 respondents, 55%) were those who said fireworks were culturally important to them; the next largest group (215, 25%) was those who said fireworks were part of family tradition; only 11 respondents (1% of those who did not believe fireworks were a problem) said that fireworks were an important part of their religious celebrations.

Annex B: Summary of public engagement event with military veterans, 21 May

In our online survey of fireworks petitioners, dozens of veterans of military conflicts and their families described fireworks triggering panic attacks or symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We invited veterans who completed the survey and had given consent to be contacted to a deliberative workshop in Westminster. The first part of the workshop was intended to provide a fuller understanding of the experiences of veterans affected by fireworks; in part two the group discussed the case for a ban on public sale and use of fireworks and several compromise solutions.

The discussion was chaired by our Committee Member, Martyn Day MP, and facilitated by House of Commons staff.

Six members of the public took part:

- Three military veterans who found fireworks very problematic, one of whom had been diagnosed with combat PTSD and attended the workshop with his partner;
- The partner of a military veteran with combat PTSD who felt unable to attend in person and talk about his experiences; and
- A clinical psychotherapist and Chairman of a national veterans' mental health charity who also had over 30 years' military service as an Army Officer.

Part one: experiences

The veterans explained that they were generally fine through the year until the main fireworks season began in October. For some, anxiety began to build as fireworks season approached.

Organised public firework displays caused relatively few problems, because it was generally known when and where they would be held, and they could prepare for them. The problems came mostly from private displays in domestic gardens and fireworks set off in other public areas, when they didn't know they were coming and could not prepare.

All the veterans described problems associated with the "randomness" of fireworks; it was impossible to use the usual "avoiding behaviours" to mitigate the effects of sudden loud noises when you didn't know when a firework might be set off.

Veterans described the problems caused by fireworks of different colours. For example, green fireworks brought on recollections of gunfire. Other colours brought on different memories. For example, for one veteran some fireworks brought on flashbacks of being in an ambush, which caused him to "cower in a corner, a quivering wreck", shaking and crying. This veteran said, "it takes you straight back to Afghanistan". He argued very strongly that veterans needed much more support, including much greater control of fireworks.

A veteran explained that, when fireworks season came around, he tended to finish work, come home and go straight upstairs. He would put headphones on to drown out any noise

from fireworks. He described disturbed sleep from October/November until the new year, every year. The problem had affected his family life, including his two-year-old daughter; on one occasion an explosion from a firework had caused him to react to take cover with his daughter.

All the veterans talked about fireworks causing this kind of “hyper-vigilance”, in which military training “instinctively kicked in”. This included those whose symptoms stopped short of a combat PTSD diagnosis but who were still badly affected. A veteran in this situation described sudden, unexpected loud noises such as fireworks causing him to shake and re-live military experiences in much the same way as those with PTSD. Another said that he had, “come out of [the armed forces] pretty unscathed, but for those three weeks around fireworks night it’s horrendous”.

The group agreed that it only took one loud unexpected bang to trigger bad reactions. The partner of a veteran described how a single bang from a firework had almost caused her husband to crash while driving his car. A single firework could trigger a reaction which made it impossible to sleep that night.

A partner of a veteran described the fireworks season’s effects on family life. Her partner would “not talk for three weeks”. It was a really difficult time every year, particularly because the fireworks season coincided with Remembrance Day, which provoked strong memories and emotions. It was a “horrible” time for the whole family. She described the frustration of not being able to do anything to prevent the problems occurring every year. She said the fireworks season seemed to be “getting longer every year”; she described last year’s season as “the most prolonged and random season ever”.

Part two: solutions

There was strong support for a ban on the sale and use of fireworks by the general public. Veterans and their partners argued strongly that use of fireworks by the general public could and should be better controlled. It was mentioned several times that fireworks were essentially explosives. Veterans and their partners felt strongly that they should be handled and used by professionals only. One participant couldn’t understand “why they can’t be controlled like weapons with licences and safe storage”.

From a clinical psychotherapy perspective, however, it was noted that loud, unexpected bangs could never be eliminated from life and that there were treatments available for those affected. It was important that such treatments were made more widely available.

The group discussed four main alternatives to a total ban on public sale and use:

1. Quieter fireworks

There was little support for making fireworks quieter. The group was sceptical that they would be effective for them. It was noted that “a bang is a bang and will trigger a reaction”. It was not just the bang of a firework that was problematic, it was also the sound as they were set off and ascending. Making fireworks quieter could not entirely solve the problem in any case, because the noise of fireworks was not the only trigger for veterans’ reactions; they were also affected by the differently coloured flashing lights, as discussed above. The group felt that it would be impossible to control the level of sound, type of sound and

the flashing lights of fireworks. The partner of a veteran felt that laser light shows could reproduce much of the spectacle of a fireworks display without the problems associated with noise.

2. Greater restrictions on sale and use

Veterans and their partners did not believe that fireworks should be banned altogether but felt strongly that they should only be used by professionals in a more organised and structured way. One participant praised the organisation of large, professional fireworks events, such as the National Fireworks Championships.

There was a strong view that if fireworks were to remain on sale to the public, the age restriction of 18 should be raised. There was also some scepticism, however, that age restrictions on sales were properly enforced.

Veterans argued that if the public were to be allowed to buy and use fireworks, they should be required to get a permit—probably from the local authority (County Council level)—which stated when and where they intended to use them. Dates and times of displays could then be made public. Participants believed a local event permit system could lead to more organised, public displays, and, if an entry fee were charged, raise more revenue to offset some of the public costs of fireworks, such as resource costs for emergency services. It was believed the system could tie-in with existing HSE guidelines.

3. Greater enforcement and harsher penalties for fireworks misuse

The group believed current rules, such as the 11pm–7am curfew, were very difficult to enforce. There was also a strong view that the police did not have enough resources to enforce the rules. There was scepticism that stiffer penalties would deter misuse and scepticism they would be any more effectively enforced than current penalties.

4. Community-based solutions (e.g. awareness raising and promoting greater consideration for neighbours)

A partner of a veteran felt that local awareness campaigns “couldn’t hurt” but was doubtful that they could “make a huge difference”. She said she hadn’t told her neighbours about the effects of fireworks on her partner, and so couldn’t say whether raising their awareness would change their behaviour. She didn’t feel it was appropriate to disclose her partner’s problems because it was a private matter. One participant didn’t believe that a “self-policed” local system could work. A veteran argued that **politicians needed to do more to help raise awareness, in Parliament and in the media, of the effects of fireworks on veterans. It was felt that high profile interventions such as this could make a difference.** It was noted that the public were very aware of the effects of fireworks on animals, but much less so about the effects on veterans. There was a feeling that no one in the public eye was standing up for veterans on this issue.

Other options

- The group discussed the possibility of “pricing fireworks out of the market” but it was felt that people would find a way around this, and that fireworks might be sold illegally.

- One veteran believed illegal sales were already common in his area, for example from small stores and pop-up shops. He felt sales should be restricted to larger retailers, perhaps supermarkets, only.
- The partner of a veteran argued that the government should create a fund to help veterans pay for better, sound-proofed windows.

Ranking of solutions in order of preference

The clear preferred option throughout the workshop was a ban on the public sale and use of fireworks.

Of the other options, the clear favourite was some form of greater control on public sale and use—with the clearest option with the greatest support being a local-authority controlled permit licensing.

Community-based, or high-profile national, awareness-raising also received some support, but there was much less certainty that this would be effective.

No one in the group believed making fireworks quieter or stiffer penalties for misuse would be effective.

Annex C: Summary of public engagement event with people with disabilities and health conditions, 2 July

In our online survey of fireworks petitioners, people with a very wide range of health conditions and disabilities told us that fireworks caused them problems.

We invited survey respondents and others, including those representing organisations which support people with health conditions and disabilities, to a deliberative workshop in Westminster.

The discussion was Chaired by our Chair, Helen Jones MP, and facilitated by House of Commons staff.

Eight members of the public took part, in two groups:

1. People with learning disabilities and their support workers;
2. Representatives of Anxiety UK, the British Tinnitus Association and a paediatric doctor specialising in audiology.

The first part of the workshop was intended to provide a fuller understanding of the experiences of people adversely affected by fireworks; in part two the groups discussed the case for a ban on public sale and use of fireworks and several compromise solutions, including quieter fireworks, greater restrictions on who could use them or when they could be used, stricter penalties for fireworks misuse and awareness-raising.

Part one: experiences

Group 1

The group was **not against fireworks per se and did not want to “spoil people’s fun”**. The group was, however, generally concerned about the effects of fireworks on people, animals and property. They were concerned about how late at night they were set off and how often they were set off throughout the year.

While they liked the concept of fireworks, **the main problem was they were just too loud.**

There was a belief that children aged 13–16 were buying and using fireworks. They were concerned about local misuse of fireworks, including close to residential properties, with **“kids letting them off randomly”**. It was worst in the summer and around bonfire night. Fireworks made them jumpy and they found it difficult to sleep when there were fireworks. One person knew of someone for whom fireworks noise caused seizures.

Group 2

People in group 2 noted that noise phobia was a recognised condition, and that sudden, **unexpected noise was problematic for people with a range of noise phobias, hearing problems, anxiety disorders and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Panic attacks instigated by fireworks noise were a common experience for these people.**

PTSD was often associated in public consciousness with military service, but it was in fact much more widely diagnosed in the general population in relation to a diverse range of traumatic experiences.

The effects of fireworks could be severe for people with hyperacusis (heightened sensitivity to sound, which affected about 1 in 20 people and was more prevalent among children with autistic spectrum disorders).

While people expected fireworks noise in November and could often take actions to prepare for it, **unexpected fireworks noise at other times of the year was more difficult to cope with.**

The effects of fireworks noise were often **doubly difficult for people with support pets, which could also be adversely affected.** It was noted that guide dogs could often be affected not only by the noise but also by the smell of fireworks.

The coping strategies deployed by people affected by fireworks often **exacerbated pre-existing feelings of isolation.** People would often stay in the house, wearing ear defenders or playing loud music. Others would travel to remote areas to get away from the noise. This could **magnify loneliness and a sense of “not being part of the fun”.**

Sometimes the effects were exacerbated by a lack of family support or understanding. Family life could be impinged on, as affected people could become moody and depressed.

The group discussed some technical aspects of the effects of fireworks noise on audiology. **The group was uncertain about how “safe distances” for decibel levels were calculated and there was a feeling they did not sufficiently take into account potential effects on people’s hearing.** It was noted that the effects from anti-social use of fireworks, closer to people than the recommended safe distances, could be very damaging to hearing.

The group was **concerned that the marketing approach for fireworks sold on the internet seemed to promote the loudness of fireworks.** The paediatric doctor in the group thought this was unacceptable. The group agreed there **needed to be a public health approach to marketing, advertising and packaging, with prominent health warnings about the potential effects on hearing.** There needed to be much greater awareness of the safe distances required for domestic garden fireworks. It was noted that many gardens were much too small for safe use.

It was not always volume that was the problem. Often effects were exacerbated by the prolonged period of time over which fireworks now tended to be set off—in many places from October to January.

Part two: solutions

Group 1

Some in the group didn't support a ban on public sales and use. They believed people would find a way of buying them anyway. Others, while supporting a ban, acknowledged it might be difficult to enforce and therefore might not be effective.

The group liked the idea of quieter fireworks and wanted them to be more widely available.

There was **some support for raising the age restriction for buying fireworks to 21**, although there was some scepticism about how effectively this could be enforced.

The group discussed curfew restrictions. There was a view that 11pm was reasonable, though some doubt about this on "school nights" and, again, scepticism about enforceability.

There was support for restricting fireworks use to special occasions such as Diwali, Bonfire Night and New Year's Eve. Some in the group believed fireworks should only be used on the weekends either side of 5 November. One person felt they should be restricted to 5 November only.

The group discussed penalties for fireworks misuse. They felt that the **finer in place were appropriate and would be sufficient to deter people, if only they were properly enforced**.

There was **strong support for public awareness-raising**. The group wanted to see more "public service announcements" about potential dangers of fireworks and the adverse effects on some groups of people. There was uncertainty about whether fireworks awareness public information films were still made; the group felt that they should be brought back. They believed there should be widespread campaigns like the anti-drinking-driving campaigns around Christmas. They believed young people should be made aware in schools and youth centres. Communities should run "tell your neighbours" campaigns, to encourage people to inform others when they were planning fireworks displays.

The group felt that packaging of fireworks should be looked at. Fireworks were packaged to "look fun". There was support for plain packaging of fireworks.

There was also **support for a licensing/permit approach for all displays, including small garden displays**, with training available on how to set fireworks off safely and support for better training of fireworks retailers. The group could not reach a consensus on whether sales should be restricted to specially licensed retailers.

Group 2

In group two there was some support for quieter fireworks, though it was noted this was unlikely to provide the whole solution and there were, in any case, technical limitations to how quiet fireworks could be. There was, however, **a perception that fireworks had got louder in recent years, so the group believed there would be value in making fireworks quieter**.

There was **strong support for "revenue-neutral" local authority permit schemes**, in which people wishing to set off fireworks would be required to purchase a permit. Permit

fees would be on a sliding scale depending on the size of the fireworks event. Retailers would be prevented from selling fireworks to anyone without a permit. Dates and times of displayed would be published by the local authority.

There was more qualified support for stricter penalties for fireworks misuse, particularly where the misuse caused real harm to people. But it was noted that fireworks offences and penalties were generally difficult to enforce.

The group believed **more could be done to raise awareness about the potentially damaging effects of fireworks on some groups of people. A campaign needed to somehow build “peer-pressure” that misuse and anti-social behaviour with fireworks was as socially unacceptable as drink-driving had become in recent decades.**

Annex D: Roundtable meeting with community groups and explosives industry, 3 September

We received written evidence from several community groups, for example schools, sports clubs and Sussex bonfire societies. These groups were concerned about our inquiry and the potential consequences for them of recommendations for more stringent regulation of fireworks. All were vehemently opposed to a ban on public sales and use of fireworks.

These groups told us they used fireworks displays to raise funds, to help with their own running costs and/or for other local good causes. They argued that local displays, which tended to be organised by competent but non-professional local volunteers, brought their communities closer together. Members of Sussex bonfire societies argued that fireworks were an important and historic part of Sussex's identity and culture.

The Committee invited representatives of some of these groups, and experts from the CBI's Explosives Industry Group (EIG), which represents most of the professional display companies in the UK and also produces guides for people organising non-professional fireworks displays, to a roundtable discussion in Westminster.

The discussion was Chaired by Helen Jones MP and attended by Committee Members Martyn Day MP, Mike Hill MP and Paul Scully MP. The meeting included a representative of a Surrey school, a Devon grassroots football club, two senior representatives of Sussex bonfire societies and the Chairman and General Secretary of the EIG.

The EIG argued that there was **nothing inherently wrong with fireworks as a product. The problem lay in misuse of fireworks in communities**, for example anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the streets or use of fireworks in inappropriately small domestic gardens, without informing neighbours. **"Illegal fireworks" i.e. fireworks that did not meet safety standards or had been purchased illegally, were rare.**

All of the invited participants argued that volunteer-run community events were not part of any problem with fireworks.

EIG's view was that problems could be overcome by ensuring people used **"the right fireworks, in the right place, at the right time"**. EIG emphasised that there was almost always the right type of product for the right situation; for example, its members had been involved in displays at the Special Olympics, with appropriate fireworks selected for an audience including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including learning disabilities and autism.

The group did not believe more stringent regulation was the answer, particularly in relation to Category F3 display fireworks. They argued it would be a shame if the irresponsible actions of a minority curtailed the enjoyment of the many people who enjoyed local community fireworks displays. Broadly, **the existing Regulations were thought to be adequate, if only there were effective processes in place for reporting problems and enforcing the rules.**

Three key points were made about the likely effects of more stringent regulation of public sales and use of fireworks: that it could be **detrimental to community fundraising efforts and community cohesion**, as described above; that there were an **insufficient number of professional display companies to meet demand**; and that evidence from overseas suggested **stricter rules may not be effective**. The EIG noted that places where bans were in place throughout almost the entire year, tended to have more injuries when fireworks were permitted. Berlin, for example, had a poor safety record on New Year's Eve, the only night of the year when public use of fireworks was permitted.

All the community groups acknowledged that fireworks could be problematic, for example noise affecting animals, people with a range of health conditions and disabilities and veterans suffering with PTSD. **All reported that they took steps to inform the local community when their events were happening**, so that people who might be adversely affected could take steps to prepare. The bonfire societies noted they were at an advantage in this regard, as their events had been running for so long and were very well known locally.

The community groups reported **few, if any, complaints**. The Surrey school, for example, reported that its display, which raised around £2,500 towards the school's running costs, had run for six years without a single complaint. Representatives of bonfire societies reported that they had altered their programme of events in response to feedback from local people, but that complaints were rare.

The EIG believed that information and education were key to addressing problems associated with fireworks. It was noted that there used to be national awareness campaigns about safe and appropriate use of fireworks, but it was not clear the extent to which the Government, local authorities or others still did this education work. The group agreed **education of event organisers and neighbours was vital to ensure that those who wished to enjoy fireworks could do so appropriately and safely and those who might be adversely affected could take steps to mitigate adverse effects**.

Annex E: Survey of school students, July 2019

We asked colleagues in Parliament's Education Service to conduct surveys of school students aged between 10 and 18 years. The survey was completed in July 2019. In all, 388 school students took part. We have summarised the results below.

We asked the following questions:

1. What do you think about fireworks?

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
I love them	40.12%	134
I quite like them	36.23%	121
I'm not that keen on them	11.68%	39
I don't like them at all	6.29%	21
I don't know	5.69%	19
Totals	100%	334

2. Where do you enjoy seeing fireworks?

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
At a big display with lots of other people	33.39%	203
With a group of <u>people</u> I know, like at a school, religious institution or sports club event	20.89%	127
At home in the garden with my family and friends	25.66%	156
I don't like seeing them anywhere	7.24%	44
Other	8.22%	50
I don't know	4.61%	28
Totals	100%	608

3. Are fireworks ever kept in your home or garden shed/garage etc.?

Responses		
	Percent	Count
Yes	20.58%	71
No	61.74%	213
I don't know	11.88%	41
Prefer not to say	5.80%	20
Totals	100%	345

4. Fireworks can be very dangerous and should only be used by adults. Have you ever used, played with or carried a firework without an adult?

Responses		
	Percent	Count
Yes	27.62%	87
No	63.17%	199
I don't know	4.76%	15
Prefer not to say	4.44%	14
Totals	100%	315

5. If there are fireworks in your home or garden shed/garage, are they locked away?

Responses		
	Percent	Count
Yes	20.12%	66
No	15.55%	51
I don't know	7.32%	24
I don't think we ever keep fireworks at home	48.78%	160
Prefer not to say	8.23%	27
Totals	100%	328

6. If you have used, played with or carried a firework without an adult, where did you get it from?

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
I bought it	10.89%	33
I found it at home	4.29%	13
I found it somewhere other than at home	3.63%	11
Someone gave it to me	10.56%	32
I don't know	3.63%	11
I have never used, played with or carried fireworks without an adult around	57.10%	173
Other	3.96%	12
Prefer not to say	5.94%	18
Totals	100%	303

Formal minutes

Tuesday 29 October 2019

Members present:

Helen Jones, in the Chair

Martyn Day Mike Hill

Draft Report (*Fireworks*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 81 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Annexes agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 5 November at 2:00pm]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 11 June 2019

Sue Kerr, petitioner

[Q1–38](#)

Tuesday 25 June 2019

Steve Raper, Vice Chairman, British Firework Association, **Fraser Stevenson**, Director, Absolute Fireworks

[Q39–88](#)

Tuesday 2 July 2019

Dr Paul Logan, Director, Chemicals, Explosives and Biological Hazards Division, Health and Safety Executive, **Rachel Hallam**, Chair of Fireworks Enforcement Liaison Group and Petroleum & Safety Officer, Trading Standards Service, Worcestershire County Council, **Edward Woodall**, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Association of Convenience Stores, **Liz Vann**, Chartered Environmental Health Officer, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

[Q89–154](#)

Tuesday 9 July 2019

Claire McParland, Government Relations Manager, RSPCA, **Assistant Chief Constable Andy Prophet**, lead for Anti-Social Behaviour, National Police Chiefs Council, **Chris Kemp**, lead for Petroleum, Explosives and Fireworks, National Fire Chiefs Council

[Q155–205](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

FWS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 AF Pyro Ltd ([FWS0179](#))
- 2 Allen, Frank ([FWS0164](#))
- 3 Allen, Mrs Magda ([FWS0260](#))
- 4 Anderson, Mr Guy ([FWS0004](#))
- 5 Ankers, Mr Shaun ([FWS0005](#))
- 6 Aresta, Dr Rita ([FWS0274](#))
- 7 Argrave, Sarah ([FWS0046](#))
- 8 Armstrong, Miss Nicola ([FWS0196](#))
- 9 Arnold, Mrs Julie ([FWS0203](#))
- 10 Association of Convenience Stores ([FWS0347](#))
- 11 Association of Convenience Stores ([FWS0363](#))
- 12 Atkin, Mrs Kristine ([FWS0222](#))
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- 14 Auerbach, Irene ([FWS0023](#))
- 15 Austin, H ([FWS0301](#))
- 16 Austin, Ms Anne ([FWS0292](#))
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- 18 Baldwin, Mrs Sally ([FWS0206](#))
- 19 Ballard, Mrs Glen ([FWS0152](#))
- 20 Balletta, Mrs Ulla ([FWS0257](#))
- 21 Barber, Mrs Elizabeth ([FWS0304](#))
- 22 Barcombe Bonfire Society Limited ([FWS0325](#))
- 23 Bateman, Rachel ([FWS0027](#))
- 24 Battersea Dogs & Cats Home ([FWS0248](#))
- 25 Benedict, Mr Peter ([FWS0083](#))
- 26 Benson, Mrs Anita ([FWS0070](#))
- 27 The Big Firework Shop ([FWS0349](#))
- 28 Black, Black Cat Fireworks Ltd Lawrence ([FWS0322](#))
- 29 Blunt, Catherine ([FWS0157](#))
- 30 Blyther, Mrs Cecily ([FWS0087](#))
- 31 Bogard, Mark ([FWS0081](#))
- 32 Bogstrup, Mr Roy ([FWS0049](#))
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- 51 British Horse Society ([FWS0150](#))
- 52 British Veterinary Association ([FWS0323](#))
- 53 Buckland Athletic Football Club ([FWS0303](#))
- 54 Bullen, Mrs Denise ([FWS0063](#))
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List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2017–19

First Report	Online abuse and the experience of disabled people	HC 759
First Special Report	Online abuse and the experience of disabled people: draft recommendations for consultation	HC 1459
Second Special Report	Online abuse and the experience of disabled people: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 2122