## **Noise** pollution tsar should police aircraft **noise**, says London First

**Organisation:**London First

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**A** noise **pollution tsar should be appointed to protect people living under flight paths under new plans from a leading business group.**  
   
London First, which represents many of the UK's leading businesses, said that an independent noise ombudsman, with a range of powers including the ability to fine an airline that persistently broke noise pollution limits, would address a "basic lack of trust and transparency" between those pressing the economic case for airport expansion and local communities.  
   
A similar scheme running in Paris since 2000 has issued more than 10m euros in fines to airlines and has the power to ground the aircraft of airlines that do not pay penalties.  
   
The plan, set out in London First's More Flights, Less Noise report, comes as airports commission chair, Sir Howard Davies, prepares to announce a shortlist of potential sites for a new runway in the South East.  
   
In October, Sir Howard said that he believed there was no option but to build extra runways in the South East to cope with rising demand.  
   
The London First report shows how noise levels under flight paths are expected to fall as airlines invest in a new generation of quieter planes, but local communities and the public at large are unsure whether they will share the benefits.  
   
Baroness Jo Valentine, Chief Executive of London First, said it was vital for the UK that airport capacity was increased.  
   
But she added that unless a basic lack of trust and transparency around noise levels was addressed head-on, it might never happen.  
   
"Limiting and cutting noise are challenges for any airport but the fact is that planes are getting quieter, major airlines like British Airways and Virgin are investing heavily in new fleets and airports are actively improving landing and take-off methods to reduce the noise impact," she said.  
   
"However, we are miles behind foreign rivals when it comes to communicating how we monitor noise levels and deal with any problems.  
   
"An independent ombudsman would make sure that all airlines fulfil their obligations. It would give local communities the assurance that someone is looking out for them and policy makers a source of objective information on which to make their decisions."  
   
Under the plans, the independent Noise Ombudsman would monitor noise pollution, which would be set at appropriate levels for each individual airport by the government. It would have a range of powers, from light touch verification of plans already in place, to full scale intervention.  
   
The ombudsman would:  
 monitor all aircraft noise emissions  
 levy penalties where breaches of regulations occur  
 report on noise in a manner that is transparent and intelligible to local communities  
   
However, Baroness Valentine warned that fines should be a last resort.  
   
"Ideally, violations should be dealt with through investigation of their root causes, and working with airports and airlines to prevent their reoccurrence, rather than automatically applying a penalty," she said.  
   
"A risk of the 'parking ticket' approach is that penalties come to be seen simply as a cost of doing business when their objective should be to deter."  
   
The report also highlights a number of operational changes that could be made to reduce noise.  
   
These include 'noise preferential routes' to help aircraft avoid populated areas.