

STRAY DOGS SURVEY 2015

A report prepared for Dogs Trust



Prepared by:



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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Background and Methodology	2
1.2	Objectives	4
1.3	Definition of regions	4
1.4	Interpretation of the data	4
2	Summary of findings	5
2.1	The number of stray dogs handled	5
2.2	Seizing stray dogs	7
2.3	What happens to the UK's stray dogs?	8
2.4	Micro-chipping	9
2.5	Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners	9
2.6	Current set up of dog warden services	10
2.7	Status dogs	11
2.8	Conclusions	11
3	Regional summaries.....	13
3.1	Tyne Tees	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.2	Granada	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3	Yorkshire	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4	Central	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.5	HTV	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.6	Anglia	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.7	Carlton	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.8	Meridian	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.9	West Country	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.10	Border	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.11	Grampian	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.12	STV Central	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.13	Ulster	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.14	Wales	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.15	West	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.16	Tyne Tees and Border	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4	Campaign Region Analysis	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.1	London	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.2	Year on year changes within the Campaign Regions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.3	Comparisons between Campaign Regions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5	Comparisons by Country	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6	APPENDICES.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.1	Appendix A: Authorities by Region	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6.2	Appendix B: Questionnaire and communication examples	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Methodology

Dogs Trust commissions a survey of local authority dog wardens and environmental health officers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland annually, to investigate what happens to the UK's stray dogs. GfK Social Research has been running the Stray Dogs survey since 2003, and was again chosen in 2015. The research consisted of two stages: an initial telephone sweep of local authorities was carried out between 30th March and 3rd April 2015, to update contact details and collect email addresses. For those with email addresses, initial email invitations were sent to all named individuals. If no email address had been supplied, postal questionnaires were sent out to named respondents. These invitations were sent to all 370 local authorities with responsibility for environmental health in Great Britain in the week commencing 20th April 2015.

Two options for completion were made available to respondents to enable them to go through the survey in the most convenient way for them. They could either complete the survey online, or complete a paper version which could be returned to GfK via a freepost envelope, fax or email. Following postal, email and telephone reminders by both GfK and Dogs Trust, 319 questionnaires were returned by the deadline (26th June 2015), giving a response rate of 86% across the 370 councils in England, Scotland and Wales (Great Britain).

Table 1 shows the response rate broken down by TV region, campaign region and country. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland were contacted separately (directly by Dogs Trust) and their data was later merged with the Great Britain data set. As with previous years, all of the 26 authorities in Northern Ireland responded, giving an overall response rate of 87% (345 responding authorities across all 396 in the UK).

In 2015, a new campaign region, London, containing 33 local authorities, was added to the analysis. Thirty-one of the local authorities in this region had responded, giving a 94% response rate. For a full list of the councils included in this region, please see Appendix 6.1.1.

Table 1: Response rates

TV Region	Authorities Responding	Total Authorities	Response Rate %
Tyne Tees (North East)	16	16	100
Granada (North West)	27	35	77
Yorkshire (Yorkshire)	20	21	95
Central (Midlands)	51	65	78
HTV (Wales and West)	26	29	90
Anglia (East & Anglia)	31	37	84
Carlton (London)	65	70	93
Meridian (Southern)	34	43	79
West Country (South West)	14	17	82
Border (Borders)	7	7	100
Grampian (Northern Scotland)	9	9	100
STV Central (Central Scotland)	19	21	90
Ulster (Northern Ireland)	26	26	100
Wales	21	22	95
Tyne Tees & Border	23	23	100
GADAL London	31	33	94
GADAL North East	27	27	100
GADAL North West	29	37	78
GADAL Wales	21	22	95
GADAL Northern Ireland	26	26	100
England	268	317	85
Scotland	29	31	94
Northern Ireland	26	26	100
Wales	21	22	100
Total	345	396	87

1.2 Objectives

This survey aims to provide information about the number of stray dogs handled by local authorities in the UK, how these dogs were dealt with and the ways in which they were reunited with their owners. Data is collated at both a regional and a national level.

As the data is compared and contrasted year on year, the questionnaire remained exactly the same in 2015, to ensure consistency in tracking data over time.

1.3 Definition of regions

The findings are analysed according to the 13 ITV regions throughout the UK. The definitions are as follows: Tyne Tees (North East), Granada (North West), Yorkshire (Yorkshire), Central (Midlands), HTV (Wales and West), Anglia (East and Anglia), Carlton (London), Meridian (Southern), West Country (South West), Border (Borders), Grampian (Northern Scotland), STV Central (Central Scotland), and Ulster (Northern Ireland).

Since 2009, reference has also been made to the newly formed TV regions of Tyne Tees and Border (incorporating Tyne Tees and Border regions), and to Wales and West as two separate regions.

Findings are also analysed by five campaign regions – at previous years these have been: GADAL North East, GADAL North West, GADAL Wales and GADAL Northern Ireland. In 2015, London was added as a new campaign region: it is comprised of thirty-three local authorities and is a subset of the larger Carlton TV region.

1.4 Interpretation of the data

In order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional totals. As a result, the individual region figures do not always equal the all-UK total.

Some of the findings in this report are based on actual numbers reported by each authority; however, at some points reference is made to 'estimated' figures. We have grossed up the reported figures to make approximations for each TV region based on the assumption that the authorities responding are representative of authorities as a whole.

Due to high levels of non-response at some questions it is not viable to provide information in terms of percentages (as we do not know for certain whether a non-response means there is no information available, that zero dogs would fit into that category, or something else) and so we have focused on reported numbers rather than reported percentages at some points during the report.

Where figures are shown for Wales, West and Tyne Tees & Border TV regions these are additional to, and do not make up part of, the overall UK totals.

It is also worth noting that the 26 authorities within Northern Ireland only provide data on the numbers of strays handled by the local authority, put to sleep, reunited with their owners and passed on to welfare organisations. They do not provide information on micro-chipping, reasons strays were put to sleep, and their handling of status dogs. Where these figures are reported, they are based on the 319 responding authorities in Great Britain.

Comparisons are made with previous surveys where appropriate in this report.

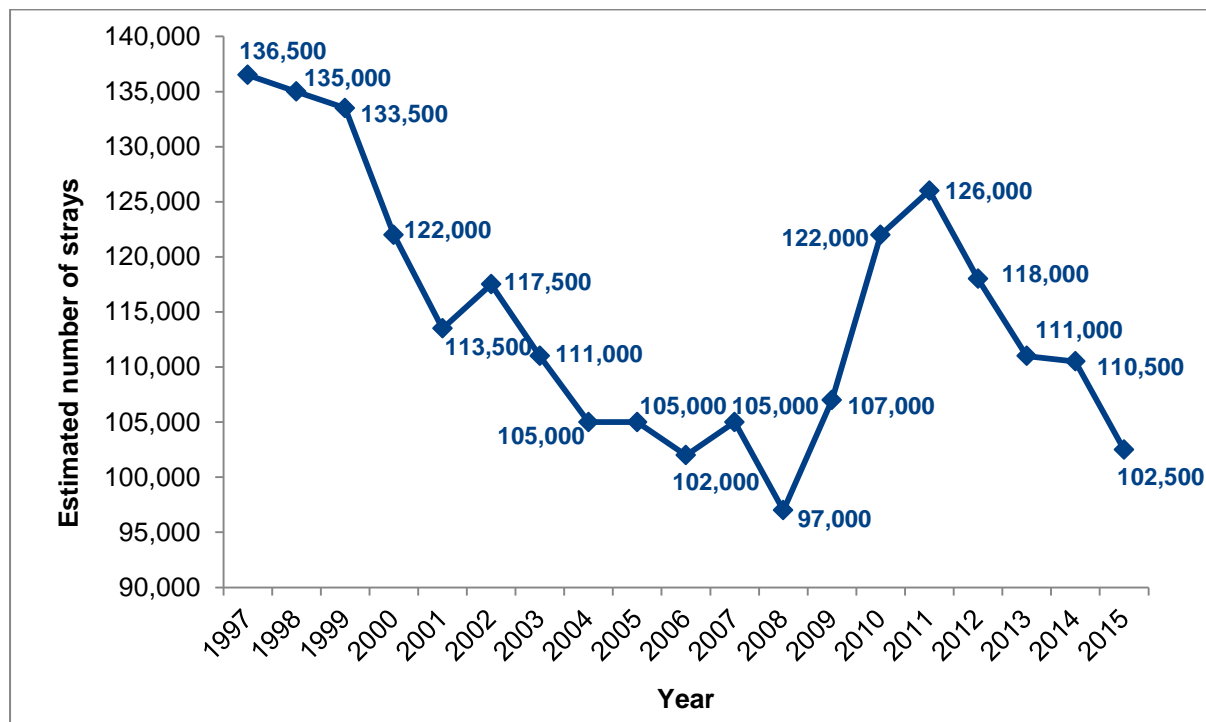
2 Summary of findings

2.1 The number of stray dogs handled

Based on all 345 authorities who responded to this survey, an estimated 102,363 stray dogs were handled by local councils across the UK between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015. This represents an eight percentage point decrease from the estimate of 110,675 dogs handled during the same period in 2013 to 2014.

Chart 1 shows the estimated number of stray dogs handled annually across the UK since 1997. The estimated number of strays has stabilised in recent years.

Chart 1: Estimated number of stray dogs in the UK since 1997



Base: All local authorities in the UK (396)

Using the latest available census data (recorded in 2011) we are able to estimate the number of people per stray dog across the UK. This year local authorities across the UK handled an average of one stray for every 617 people (slightly fewer than the one stray per 571 people last year). It is worth noting, however, that there are significant regional variations.

For instance, in the Central STV region local authorities dealt with one stray dog for every 1,598 people on average; whilst in the Tyne Tees region, there is an estimated average of 373 people per stray dog. Table 2 provides the full regional breakdown in terms of the number of strays to people figures across the UK.

The regional differences in the number of stray dogs reported by different authorities will reflect a number of factors, including the population size and the number of dogs owned in the area.

Table 2: Estimated number of people per stray dog by TV region

TV Region	Estimated number of strays 2014-2015	Total authorities in region	Estimated strays per authority	Estimated number of people per stray
Tyne Tees	7,457	16	466	373
Granada	15,124	35	432	464
Yorkshire	8,909	21	424	723
Central	18,327	65	282	500
HTV	11,245	29	388	494
Anglia	7,210	37	195	631
Carlton	11,883	70	170	1,005
Meridian	8,656	43	201	701
West Country	4,022	17	237	456
Border	1,014	7	145	623
Grampian	1,441	9	160	965
STV Central	2,490	21	119	1,598
Ulster	5,170	26	199	354
Wales	8,049	22	366	381
Tyne Tees & Border	8,471	23	368	403
UK Total*	102,363	396	258	617

**Please note: in order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional total. Therefore totals do not always equal the sum of all regions. All figures shown have been grossed up to represent 100% of authorities within each region. Tyne Tees & Border is calculated separately and so may not exactly match the combined figures from the Tyne Tees region and Border region.*

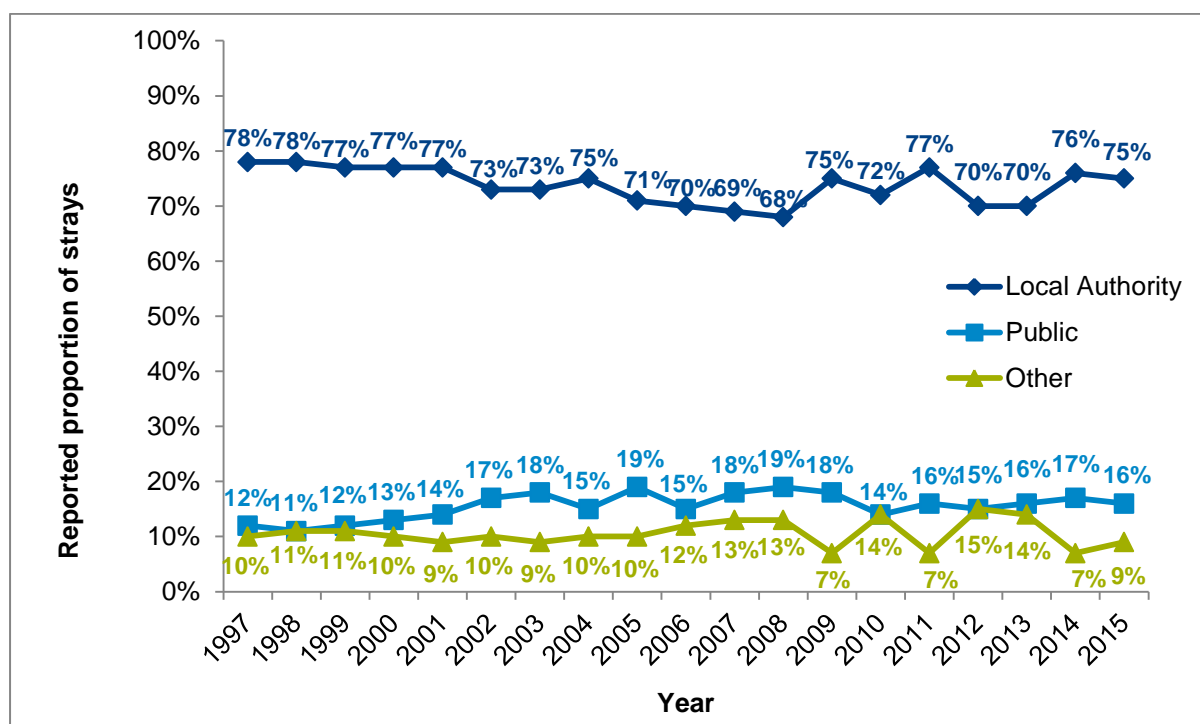
2.2 Seizing stray dogs

The survey first asked local authorities to detail the number of stray dogs that were seized or taken in between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015. This was broken down across a number of key sources including: seized by the local authority as strays, brought in by the general public and brought in by the police.

As in previous years, local authorities themselves were responsible for seizing the majority of stray dogs, accounting for 75% of those reported; comparable to the 76% identified last year. Sixteen per cent of stray dogs were brought in by the general public, a figure that has remained stable over recent years.

Chart 2 shows the trends in how stray dogs are being seized since 1997. The figures have remained largely stable over time.

Chart 2: How stray dogs were brought to the local authorities



Base: All local authorities in the UK (396)

The 'other' figure shown in Chart 2 accounts for a variety of sources including: dogs brought in by the police (1%), seized under the Dangerous Dogs Act (1%), picked up by out of hours contractors (1%) and dogs already in local authority kennels on 1st April 2014 (1%). Transfers from vets, the RSPCA, dog wardens, and other agencies each accounted for less than 1% of reported strays.

2.3 What happens to the UK's stray dogs?

Local authorities were also asked to provide details on what happened to the stray dogs taken in between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015.

An estimated 50% of stray dogs were reunited with their owners in this period, either by being reclaimed during the statutory local authority kennelling period (36%) or returned directly to their owner without entering a kennel (18%). These figures have remained stable over time.

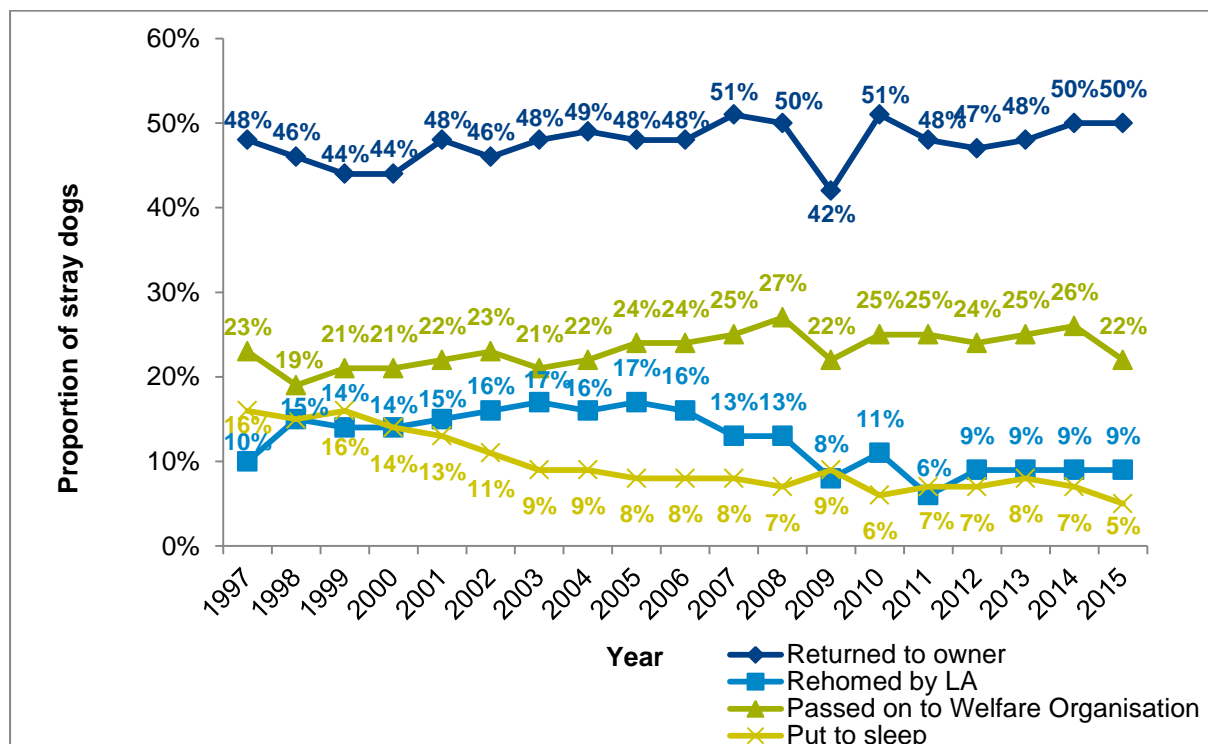
The reported number of stray dogs re-homed by local authorities across the UK has again fallen, this time from 8,906 in 2014 to 8,465 this year. However, this accounts for the same proportion re-homed by local authorities as last year (9%) due to the decrease in the estimated total number of strays. Just under a quarter, (22%), of strays were passed on to welfare organisations or dog kennels after the statutory period. This proportion remains the same as last year and is in line with estimates over the last 10 years.

The estimated proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep was 5%, a slight decrease from 7% last year. This year 4,880 stray dogs were reported as having been put to sleep by authorities taking part in this survey (7,058 last year). From this figure we can estimate that approximately 5,142 dogs were put to sleep across the UK during the period of 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015. This compares with an estimated 7,805 put to sleep last year.

Amongst the authorities responding, details were given for around half of reported destructions (51%). It was reported that 1,367 dogs were put to sleep due to behavioural problems or aggression, 717 due to ill health, and 390 under the Dangerous Dogs Act.

Chart 3 shows the trends in how stray dogs have been handled since 1997.

Chart 3: What happens to stray dogs?



Base: Responding local authorities in the UK (345)

In addition to these key outcomes, 1% of strays were also reported as still being in the local authority kennels after 31st March 2015. A variety of other outcomes were also mentioned, including strays being kept or retained by finders (134 dogs), and dogs being dead when found or dying whilst in kennels (21 dogs). Details were not given to account for all stray dogs.

2.4 Micro-chipping

This year dog wardens reported that 17,789 (20%) of the dogs taken in were already microchipped. This compares to 16,443 (16%) of the dogs taken in last year. This figure has been rising rapidly over the last few years: from 5,920 in 2011-2012, to 10,213 in the 2012-2013 period¹.

Three hundred local authorities answered the question (added in 2014) about the numbers of dogs brought in with foreign microchips. Twenty six percent of the responding LAs said the proportion had increased (3% significantly), whereas six percent said the number had decreased (2% significantly). A quarter of local authorities (26%) stated that the proportions had stayed the same in the 2014/2015 period. These figures are mostly identical to last year.

2.5 Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners

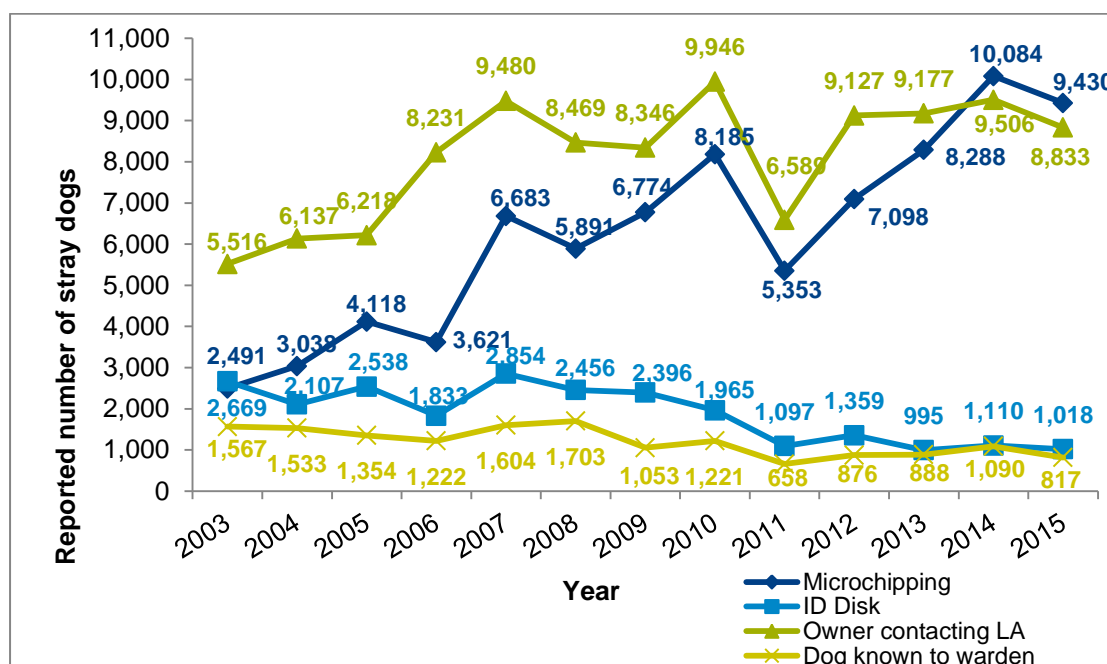
The survey also asked about methods by which stray dogs had been successfully reunited with their owners². This year the methods responsible for reuniting dogs with their owners were given for 23,016 strays, which accounts for 47% of all dogs that were returned to or reunited with their owners (48,570).

It was reported that 8,833 dogs were reunited due to the owner contacting the local authority or pound directly. Microchips alone accounted for 9,430 reunions (a figure which has been climbing since 2011 and has stabilised in 2015: see Chart 4), ID disks for 1,018 reunions and the combination of the two for 1,066 reunions. In addition, it was also reported that 817 dogs were reunited due to already being known to the dog warden. These figures remain largely in line with previous years.

¹ These figures should, however, be treated with some caution as details were only given for around one in five reported strays. This has improved on previous years, however, with details only given for one in six reported strays last year and one in ten the year before.

² It is worth noting that these figures refer only to instances where the methods used to reunite stray dogs have been identified and that unspecified methods of tracing owners have been excluded from this calculation. As a result, figures cannot accurately be compared to previous years.

Chart 4: Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners



Base: Responding local authorities in Great Britain (345)

Other reasons for dogs being returned to their owners included via Facebook (173 dogs) and local/council registration schemes (98 dogs). It was also reported that this information was not available or had not been kept for 1,380 (3%) dogs, down from 5% (2,706 dogs) during the same period last year.

2.6 Current set up of dog warden services

In the 2014 survey, three new questions were introduced to investigate the set-up of the dog warden services in local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. They were asked how their dog warden service is employed, who handles their strays, and the hours in which their dog warden service operates³. This group of questions was retained for the 2015 survey.

Amongst those answering, 219 authorities (71%) said their dog warden was employed directly by them, compared to 90 authorities who contracted the service out. A much higher proportion of LAs answered this question in comparison to 2014 (90% of all responders in Great Britain in 2015).

Sixty-seven percent (206) of responding authorities said that private boarding kennels handled their strays; whereas 26 (8%) authorities used a council-owned pound and 62 (20%) used welfare charity kennels to house their stray dogs. The remaining 12 authorities said that they used an alternative option for handling their strays.

³ Analysis of these questions is based only on those LAs who answered each question. In previous years, a minority of LAs responded to these questions, so the results were not disseminated as low as individual TV region. However, this year there was a marked increase in response: 309 (90%) LAs gave information about how their dog warden is employed, and provided information about who handles their strays, so this information has now also been discussed by TV region. As a consequence, the tables that were given in the appendix to display these results have been removed.

Amongst the 306 authorities responding, 283 reported that their dog warden services were operational during working hours Monday to Friday and 85 during working hours on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, 127 LAs had a dog warden service which worked on-call out of working hours Monday to Friday and 119 authorities operated an on-call service out of hours on weekends. These figures are largely comparable with the 2014 survey.

2.7 Status dogs

This year's survey again included a number of questions about 'status dogs'. Over recent years, there has been a rise in the number of people owning aggressive dogs for intimidation and dogfighting. These dogs are typically referred to as 'status dogs' and can pose a threat to humans. These dogs tend to be certain breeds – such as Bull breeds (including 'Staffies' and Mastiffs), Rottweilers, Akitas or crosses of these – as their looks and type are thought to convey a certain impression of their owner. Questions about 'status dogs' were not asked of authorities in Northern Ireland, as at previous years.

Across the 345 authorities in Great Britain, a reported 18,535 'status dogs' were handled between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015. This accounts for 21% of all strays reportedly handled. This figure has remained stable in comparison to 2014.

Of the 18,535, a reported 1,023 (6%) were put to sleep during this period due to aggressive behaviour. This is slightly lower than the 8% 'status dogs' reportedly euthanised for this reason in 2014 and 2013.

2.8 Conclusions

The number of stray dogs reported by UK authorities overall has decreased by eight percentage points since 2014. The grossed number now stands at an estimated 102,363 stray dogs across the UK. Reported figures suggest that the majority (75%) of these dogs were seized directly by the local authority as strays, with a further 16% surrendered by the general public. These figures are in line with previous years.

As seen last year, half (50%) of the estimated stray dogs handled in the UK between 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015 were reunited with their owners, and just under a quarter (22%) were passed on to a welfare organisation or dog kennel for possible rehoming. A further 9% were re-homed by the local authority.

When methods used to return stray dogs to their owners have been identified (for 23,016 dogs), this year it was reported that 9,430 reunions were due to microchips. This compares to 10,084 last year. The proportions remain stable this year after rapid increases over the past four years.

An estimated 5% of strays were put to sleep this year, a slight decrease of two percentage points since last year.

Response rates for the questions about the local authorities' dog warden services were much higher this year, with 309 LAs in England, Scotland and Wales giving details. Amongst those answering, most (71%) authorities reported that their dog warden was employed directly by them and that they used private boarding kennels to handle their strays (67% of the responding authorities). The majority (283) reported that their dog warden service operated during working hours Monday to Friday, with 85 operating during these hours on the weekend. In addition, 127 said their service operated on-call out of working hours during the week and 119 offered this service over the weekend.

The number of 'status dogs' handled overall has decreased slightly by 3,815 to 18,535 from 22,350 in 2014. This equates to 21% of all strays in 2015, compared with 22% in 2014.

There has also been a decrease in the number of 'status dogs' destroyed due to aggression, with 1,023 put to sleep this year, compared with 1,814 in 2014. However, this equates to 6% of all strays in both years.

3 Regional summaries

Table 4: Key estimated figures by TV region

	Total*	Tyne Tees	Granada	Yorkshire	Central	HTV	Anglia	Carlton	Meridian	West Country	Border	Grampian	STV Central	Ulster	Wales	Tyne Tees & Border
Base	345	16	27	20	51	26	31	65	34	14	7	9	19	26	21	23
Response rate (%)	87	100	77	95	78	90	84	93	79	82	100	100	90	100	95	100
Total strays	102,363	7,457	15,124	8,909	18,327	11,245	7,210	11,883	8,656	4,022	1,014	1,441	2,490	5,170	8,049	8,471
Put to sleep	5,142	307	1,134	1,169	1,048	329	230	655	169	44	6	26	62	409	232	313
Reunited with owner	54,767	4,444	7,524	4,736	9,619	5,603	4,146	6,253	4,982	2,686	588	1,035	1,534	1,944	3,645	5,032
Passed on to welfare orgs	22,257	1,971	2,695	1,885	4,960	2,785	1,525	2,721	516	682	336	156	529	1,411	2,386	2,307
People per stray	617	373	464	723	500	494	631	1,005	701	456	623	965	1,598	354	381	403

**Please note: in order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional total. Therefore totals do not always equal the sum of all regions. All figures shown have been grossed up to represent 100% of authorities within each region. Tyne Tees & Border is calculated separately in this way and so may not directly reflect combined figures from the Tyne Tees region and Border region.*

