



# Stray Dogs Survey Report 2018-19



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# 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. Invitations were sent by email or post to all 381 local authorities with responsibility for environmental health in the UK in the week commencing September 30th September 2019.

Following postal, email and telephone reminders by Ipsos MORI over a period of six weeks, 186 questionnaires were returned by the deadline, 8th November 2019, giving a response rate of 49% across the 381 councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Questionnaires were accepted if at least one question had been answered.

Table 1 shows the response rate broken down by TV region, campaign region and country.

## 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.

The questionnaire was updated this year to reflect the fact the survey was being run by Ipsos MORI for the first time. Additionally, two new questions were added: around the number of out of hours calls received by the dog warden service; and the predominant breed types for strays held by local authorities.

Table 1: Response rates

TV region	Authorities responding	Total authorities	Response rate
Granada (North West)	9	34	26%
Yorkshire (Yorkshire)	12	21	57%
Central (Midlands)	29	66	44%
HTV (Wales and West)	14	29	48%
Anglia (East & Anglia)	21	37	57%
Carlton (London)	46	70	66%
Meridian (Southern)	17	43	40%
West Country (South West)	7	17	41%
Border	3	7	43%
Grampian (Northern Scotland)	2	9	22%
STV Central (Central Scotland)	8	21	38%
Ulster (Northern Ireland)	9	11	82%
Wales	13	22	59%
West	1	7	14%
Tyne Tees	9	16	56%
England	155	317	49%
Scotland	9	31	29%
Northern Ireland	9	11	82%
Wales	13	22	59%
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>49%</b>

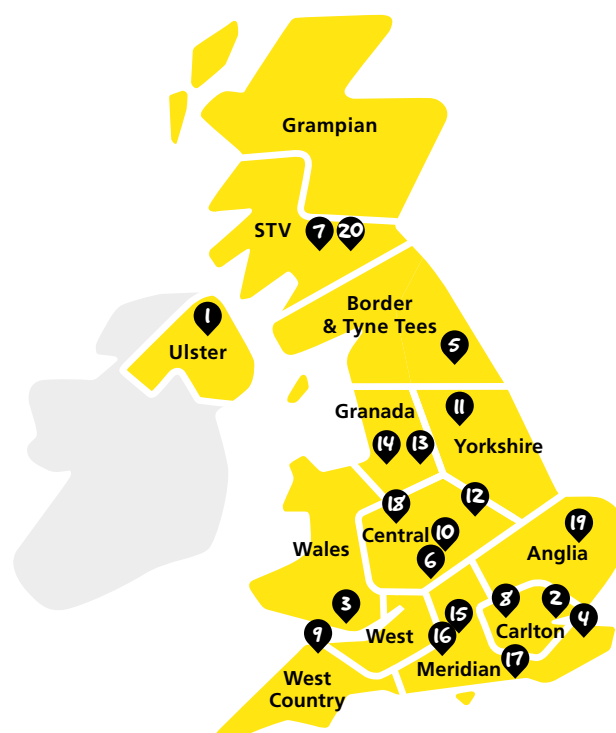
## 1.3 Definition of regions

The findings are analysed according to the 11 of the 13 ITV regions throughout the UK. The definitions have remained identical to previous years and are as follows: Granada (North West), Yorkshire (Yorkshire), Central (Midlands), 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).

Findings are also analysed by six campaign regions – at previous years these have been: GADAL North East, GADAL North West, GADAL Wales, GADAL Northern Ireland and GADAL London. Additionally, this year GADAL Scotland was added as the campaign begun in this region.

### Dogs Trust centres

- |                          |                       |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Ballymena (N.Ireland) | 8. London (Harefield) | 15. Newbury     |
| 2. Basildon              | 9. Ilfracombe         | 16. Salisbury   |
| 3. Bridgend              | 10. Kenilworth        | 17. Shoreham    |
| 4. Canterbury            | 11. Leeds             | 18. Shrewsbury  |
| 5. Darlington            | 12. Loughborough      | 19. Snetterton  |
| 6. Evesham               | 13. Manchester        | 20. West Calder |
| 7. Glasgow               | 14. Merseyside        |                 |



## 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. We report the national total, combined region totals, and individual regional totals. As not all local authorities complete the survey, these totals are calculated by grossing up the figures provided by responding LAs. The grossing process on a regional level takes into account the average results of other responding authorities in that particular region, whereas on a combined or national level it takes into account the average results for all responding LAs. As a result of this, the individual region figures do not always equal the all-UK or combined region totals. Gross figures have been rounded, so percentages may in places look one number out, but this is just reflective of the rounding process.

Following a lower response rate this year compared to previous ones, where grossed figures are included, it is important to note that these are based on less available data than in previous years, where we have fewer responses to base the grossing on. Thus grossed figures should be treated with caution and as indicative only of total figures on the basis of the limited data available.

Some of the findings in this report are based on the actual numbers reported by each authority, as opposed to the grossed ones; 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, or that zero dogs would fit into that category. And so in these cases reported numbers are given instead of reported percentages.

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

Throughout the report, references are made to 'all responding local authorities'. This refers to the number of authorities that answered that particular question, as not all authorities were compelled to answer every question in the survey.

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

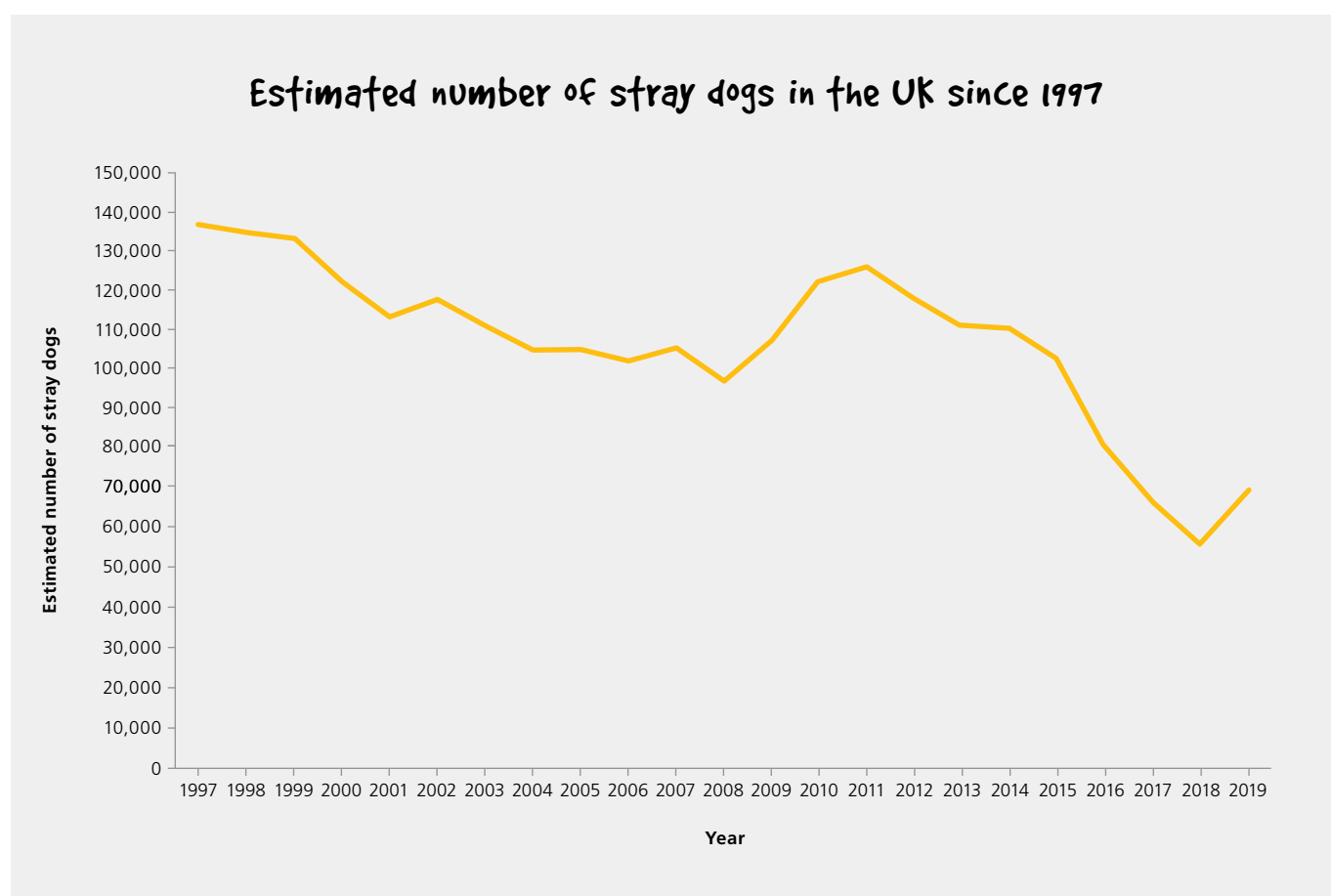
## 2. Summary of findings

### 2.1 The number of stray dogs handled

Based on all 186 authorities who responded to this survey before the deadline, an estimated 69,621 stray dogs were handled by local councils across the UK between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019. This represents an increase in the number since 2018, the first time an increase has been seen since 2011. Again it is important to note that grossing has had an impact here – when

we compare the total numbers given, without grossing, the number (33,988) is more stable.

Chart 1 shows the estimated number of stray dogs handled annually across the UK since 1997.



#### Base: All local authorities in the UK (381)

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 1,073 people – stable with one for every 1,334 people seen in 2018. There are however significant differences within this between regions.

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.

## 2.1 The number of stray dogs handled (Continued)

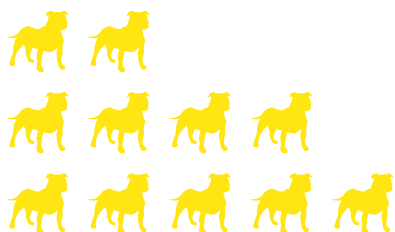
Table 2: Estimated number of people per stray dog by TV region

TV region	Estimated number of strays	Total authorities in region	Estimated strays per authority	Estimated number of people per stray
Granada	9,554	34	281	734
Yorkshire	4,149	21	198	1,553
Central	12,376	66	188	740
Anglia	7,361	37	199	618
Carlton	6,504	70	93	1,836
Meridian	4,437	43	103	1,367
West Country	3,354	17	197	546
Border	775	7	111	816
Grampian	27	9	3	51,482
STV Central	4,717	21	225	844
Ulster	5,414	11	492	338
West	2,100	7	300	735
Wales	5,143	22	234	596
Tyne Tees & Border	5,517	23	240	618
London	3,038	33	93	2,641
<b>UK Total*</b>	<b>69,621</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>1,073</b>

### Number of stray dogs taken in from 1 April – 31 March

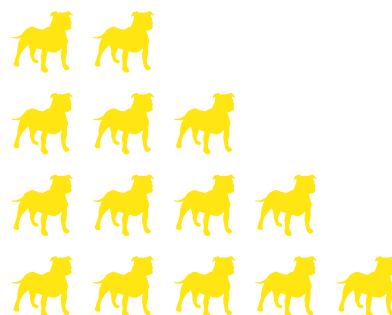
2017–18

56,043



2018–19

69,621



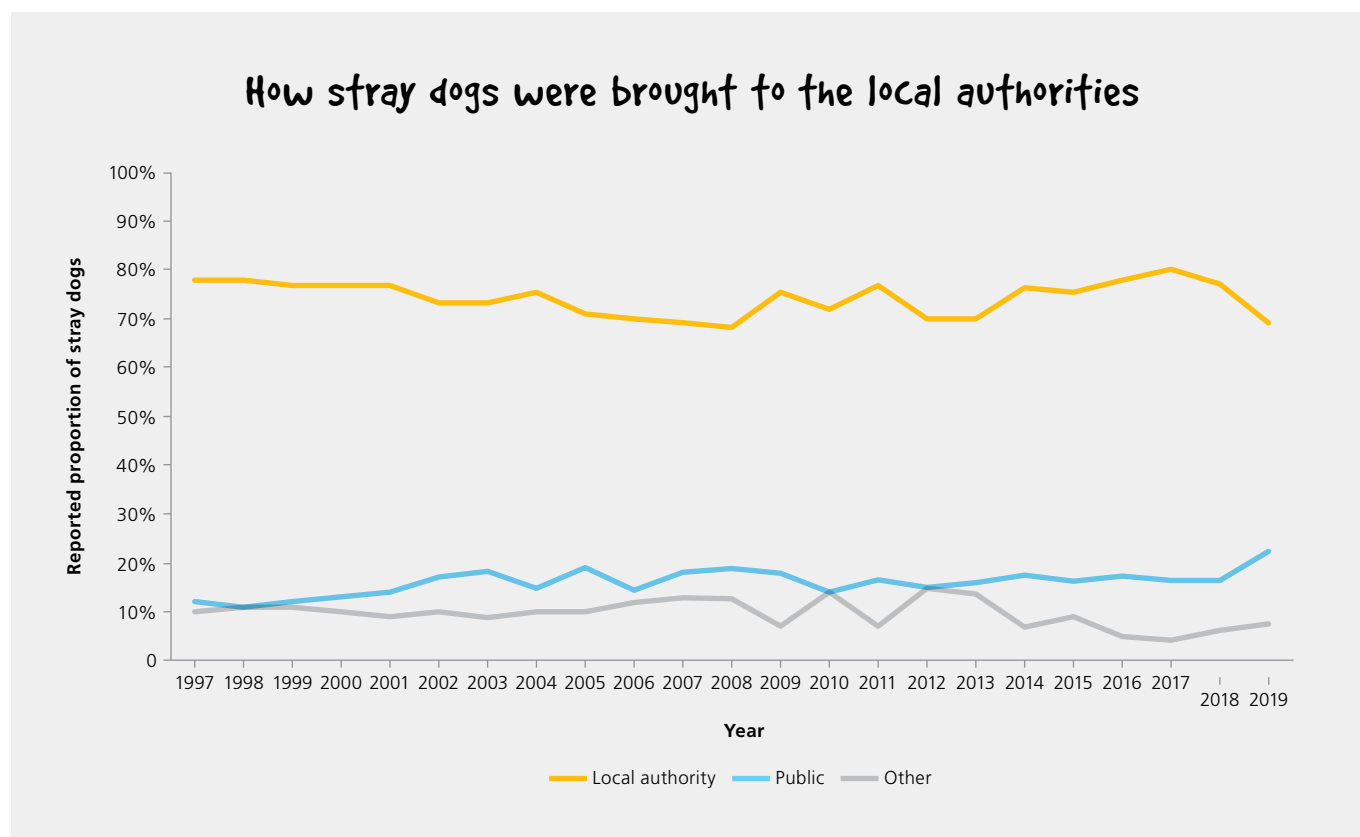
\* Please note: in order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional total. Therefore totals do not always equal the sum of all regions. All figures shown have been grossed up to represent 100% of authorities within each region. Please see section 1.4 for an explanation of why individual region totals do not always equal combined region/national totals.

## 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 2018 and 31st March 2019. 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.

Overall this year there has been a very slight shift towards more dogs having been brought in by the public, and fewer being seized by local authorities. In 2019, local authorities were responsible for seizing 69% of all stray dogs; compared to 77% last year. 22% of stray dogs were brought in by the general public, compared to 16% in 2018.

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



### Base: All local authorities in the UK (381)

The 'other' figure shown in Chart 2 accounts for a variety of sources including: 1% dogs brought in by the police, 1% brought in by other means and dogs already in local authority kennels on 1st April 2018 - 4%. Transfers from vets, the RSPCA, dog wardens, and other agencies each accounted for less than 1% of reported strays which is consistent with previous years.

As in 2018, the figure does not differentiate those brought in under the Dangerous Dogs act, as this question was asked separately – asking authorities instead to provide how many dogs, of those brought in above, were in response to this act, rather than separating this as a method of seizing. Of those who responded, 21 authorities said at least one dog was seized in response to the act – down from 27 in 2018 and 37 in 2017.

## 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 2018 and 31st March 2019.

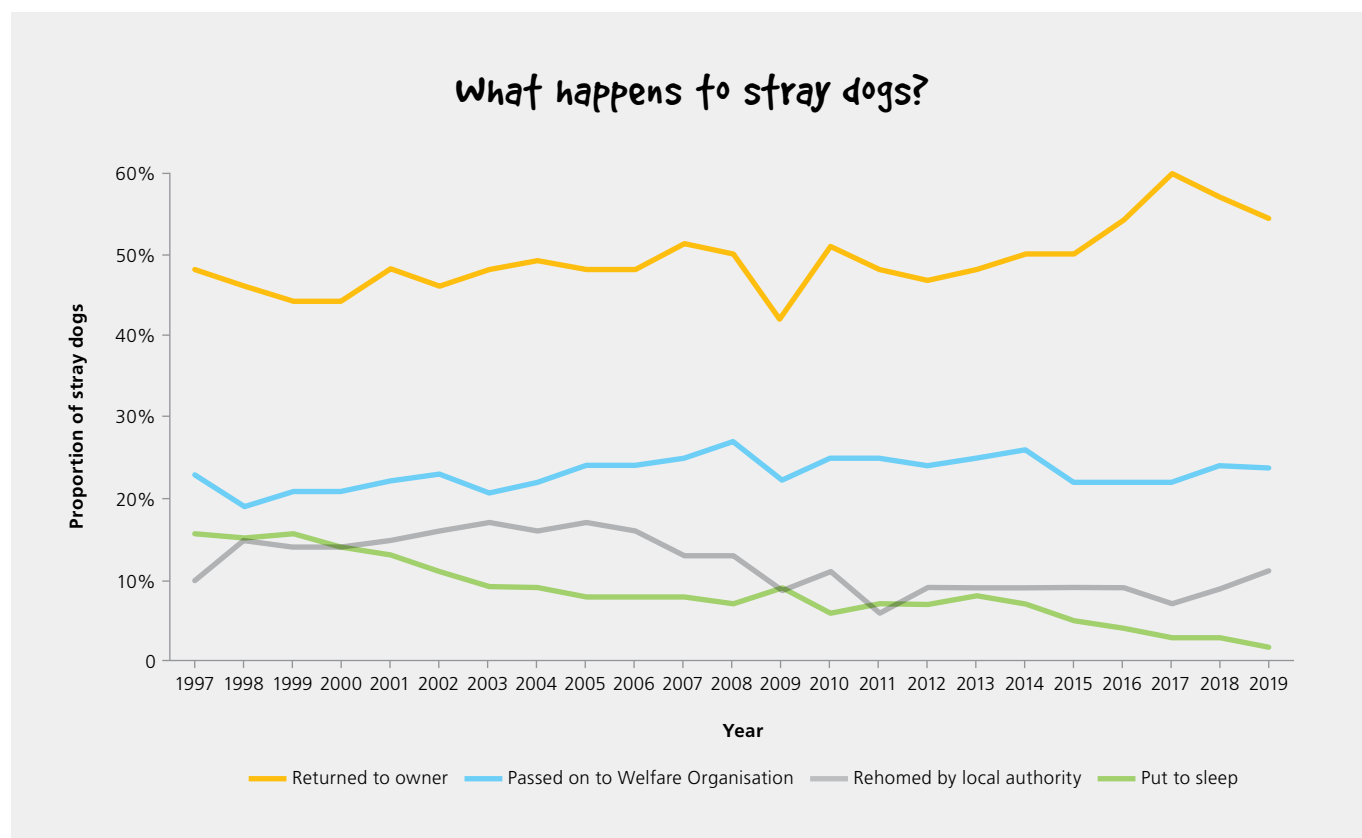
An estimated 54% of stray dogs were reunited with their owners in this period, either by being reclaimed during the statutory local authority kennelling period (36%) or returned directly to their owner without entering a kennel (18%). Both figures are stable with previous results.

An estimated 7,778 dogs were rehomed by local authorities this year, an increase from 5,080 in 2018 – now accounting for 11% of all strays. 24% of strays were passed onto a welfare organisation this year, stable with results seen in 2018 at 22%.

The estimated proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep was 2%, down on 3% in 2018. This year 636 stray dogs were reported as having been put to sleep by authorities taking part in this survey. From this figure we can estimate that approximately 1,303 dogs were put to sleep in total across the UK during the period of 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 – compared to an estimated 1,462 put to sleep last year.

Details were given for around two thirds of reported destructions. It was reported that 137 dogs were put to sleep due to ill health, 198 due to behavioural problems or aggression (down from 412 last year), 48 under the Dangerous Dogs Act (down from 82 in 2018 and 206 in 2017), and 39 due to being unclaimed or having no rescue available.

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



### Base: All local authorities in the UK (381)

In addition to these key outcomes, 6% of strays were also reported as still being in the local authority kennels after 31st March 2019 (from 1% in 2018). A variety of other outcomes were also mentioned, including strays being kept or retained by finders

and dogs dying after being taken in. Details were not given to account for all stray dogs, with about 18% of all reported stray dogs left unaccounted for at this question.



## 2.4 Microchipping

This year dog wardens reported that 38% of the total number of stray dogs which were taken in were already microchipped<sup>1</sup>. This compares to 36% in 2018, maintaining a gradual rise over time in microchipping.

It was reported that of all the seized dogs who had microchips but were unable to be returned to their owners, in 78% of cases this was due to incorrect contact or owner details being registered on the chip. In 17% of cases it was due to the dog being unwanted by its owner.

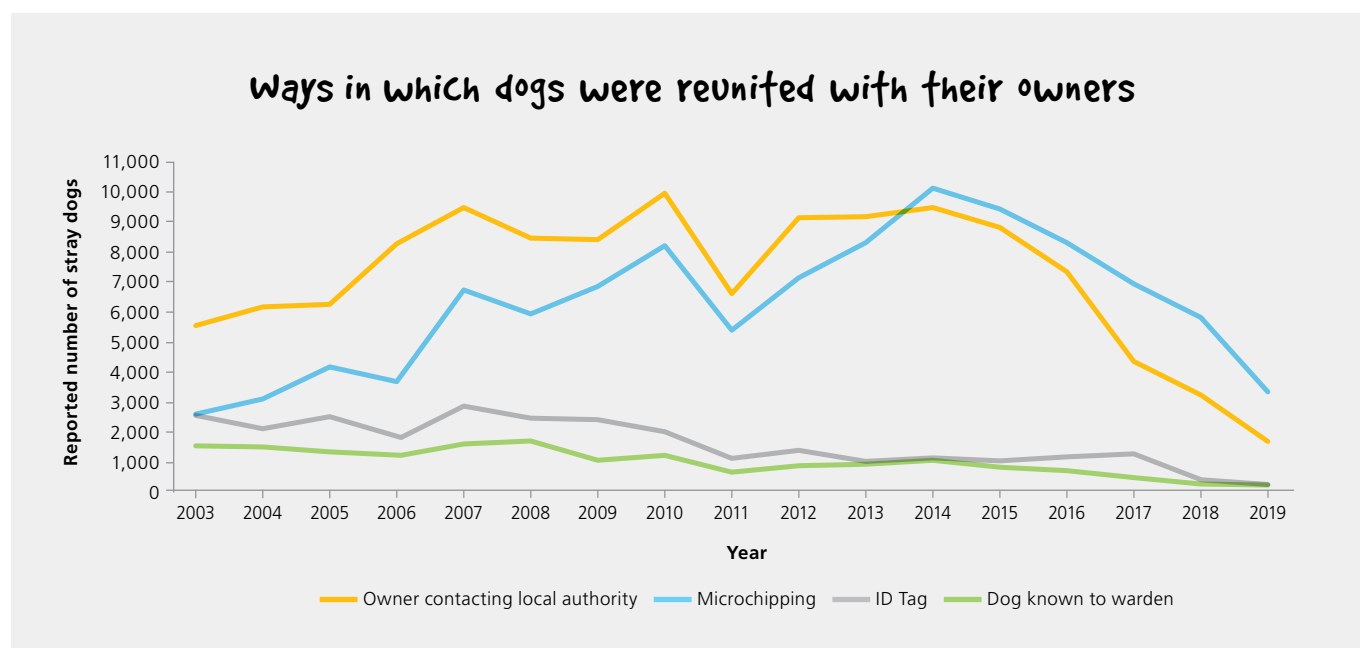
Of the 203 local authorities that responded to the question on whether they offered a microchipping service, over half said that they did. 22 offered this free to the owner at costs to the council, 63 offered free to the owner using Dogs Trust chips, and 31 passed the fee onto the client. 87 local authorities said they did not offer such a service.

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that this figure is substantially higher among the total dog population, and is likely to be lower among strays as a result of both the grossing process within this data, and a lower level of compliance among stray dog owners.

## 2.5 Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners

This year the methods responsible for reuniting dogs with their owners were given for 5,563 strays, which accounts for 42% of all dogs that were reported as being returned to or reunited with their owners.

It was reported that 1,606 dogs were reunited due to the owner contacting the local authority or pound directly – accounting for 12% of all returns. Microchips alone accounted for 3,245 of reunions, and ID tags 84. 181 dogs were reunited as a result of having both a microchip and identification tag. In addition, it was reported that 191 dogs were reunited due to already being known to the dog warden. These figures remain largely in line with previous years.



**Base: Responding local authorities in UK who said any dogs returned to owner (186)**

Other reasons for dogs being returned to their owners included via social media contact with owner, or the pound being able to contact the owner through other means.

## 2.6 Current set up of dog warden services

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This year 122 local authorities (66%) said their dog warden was employed directly by them, compared to 54 authorities (29%) who contracted the service out. Both proportions are stable with results in 2018.

67% of authorities said their strays were handled by private boarding kennels; whereas 14% authorities used a council-owned pound and 25% used welfare charity kennels to house their stray dogs – both stable with 2018 results. 8% of local authorities said they use an alternative method for handling their strays this year.

In terms of operational hours, 98% reported that their dog warden services were operational during working hours Monday to Friday and 39% during working hours on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, 52% had a dog warden service which worked on-call out of working hours Monday to Friday and 53% of authorities operated an on-call service out of hours on weekends. These figures are again largely comparable with those from previous years.

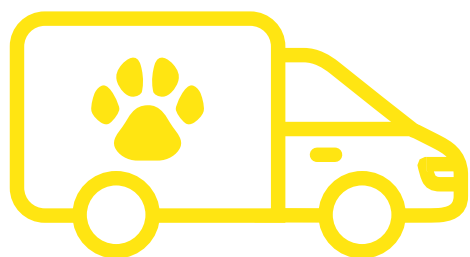
## 2.7 Dangerous dogs & predominate breed types

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Since 2017 local authorities have been asked about the number of dogs taken in or seized in response to the Dangerous Dogs act. Of the 21 authorities who gave an answer at this question, the most common response was for just one dog to have been taken in / seized for this reason. Just two authorities gave an answer of ten or more dogs this year. 165 authorities either did not know or did not record the exact number.

Local authorities were asked for the first time this year about the predominant breed types in their pounds. 163 councils answered this question, listing up to three breeds which were overrepresented. Staffordshire Bull Terriers were the most frequently mentioned breed (by 136 local authorities), followed by Jack Russell Terriers (75 mentions) and Lurchers (71). 23 local authorities said that they did not have this information.

# 53%



**53% OF LOCAL  
AUTHORITIES  
OFFER ON-CALL  
OUT OF HOURS  
WARDEN SERVICES  
AT ANY TIME**

**Table 3: What are the predominate breed types in the pounds**

	Total	Granada	Yorkshire	Central	HTV Wales/West	Anglia	Carlton	Meridian	West Country	Border	STV North (Grampian)	STV Central	Ulster	Scotland	Tyne Tees & Border	West	London
Total	186	9	12	29	14	21	46	17	7	3	2	8	9	13	9	1	22
Staffordshire Bull Terrier	136	7	7	20	9	15	35	13	7	2	1	6	6	9	8	1	19
	73%	78%	58%	69%	64%	71%	76%	78%	100%	67%	50%	75%	67%	69%	89%	100%	86%
Mastiff*	8			1		7											5
	4%			7%		15%											27%
Rottweiler	2					2											1
	1%					4%											5%
American Bull Dog	8	2	1	1		3					1		1				2
	4%	22%	8%	3%		7%					13%		8%				9%
Greyhound	6			1		3						1		1			
	3%			3%		14%						11%		11%			
Lurcher	71	1	5	11	4	12	12	10	3	3	3	1	6	6			2
	38%	11%	42%	38%	29%	57%	25%	59%	43%	100%	38%	11%	48%	67%			9%
Akita	5		1	1			2					1					2
	3%		8%	3%			4%					11%					9%
Husky	8		2	1	1		3		1								2
	4%		17%	3%	7%		7%		14%								9%
Malamute	1			1													
	1%			3%													
German Shepherd	4			1			1					2					1
	2%			3%			2%					22%					5%
Jack Russell Terrier	75	4	2	10	7	4	22	11	6	1		1	3	2	4		9
	40%	44%	17%	34%	50%	19%	48%	65%	86%	33%		13%	33%	15%	44%		41%
Border Collie	17		2		8			1	1	1	1	1	3	3		1	
	9%		17%		57%			6%	14%	33%	50%	13%	33%	23%		100%	
Crossbreed	69	5	5	15	7	7	15	3	2	1	1	1	4	5	2		7
	37%	56%	12%	52%	50%	33%	33%	18%	29%	33%	50%	13%	44%	38%	22%		32%
Labrador	12		1	2	1	2		2	1		1	1		2		1	
	6%		8%	7%	7%	10%		12%	14%		50%	13%		15%		100%	
Other	25	1	1	7	1	2	7	2		1			1	1	1		3
	13%	11%	8%	24%	7%	10%	15%	12%		33%			11%	8%	11%		14%
No information	23	2	2	3	1	4	6	1				2	1	2	1		2
	12%	22%	17%	10%	7%	19%	13%	6%				25%	11%	15%	11%		9%

\* Includes Dogue de Bordeaux

## 2.8 Conclusions

The number of stray dogs reported by responding UK authorities overall this year has remained stable with that seen in 2018, though when this is grossed up to estimate the total figure across all authorities in the UK, this represents an increase. It is important to remember that this is an estimate only and reflective of a lower response rate from authorities this year. The majority of these were seized by the local authority – though the proportion has fallen year on year (69% down from 77% in 2018). A fifth were brought in by the public this year, up from 16% last year.

54% of strays were reunited with their owners this year – stable with results in 2018. Around a quarter of stray dogs were passed onto a welfare organisation or dog kennel for possible rehoming this year, also in line with previous results. 11% strays were rehomed by the local authority this year.

Where methods used to return 5,563 stray dogs to their owners have been identified, down from 10,551 in 2018, it was reported that 3,245 reunions were due to the dog being microchipped, down from 5,775 in 2018. This continues a gradual decline over time following a rapid increase immediately prior to 2014.

An estimated 2% of strays were put to sleep this year, continuing a gradual decrease over time since 2013.

Almost all responding authorities provided information about their dog warden services this year. 66% of authorities reported that their dog warden was employed directly by them, and 29% reported contracting this service out. Both figures are unchanged over time. 67% of authorities reported using private boarding kennels for strays, down from 77% last year, and 25% welfare charity kennels, in line with results last year. Almost all answering authorities reported that their dog warden service operated during working hours during the week, with 72 operating during these hours on the weekend. In addition, 55% now offer any kind of out of hours service – in line with previous results.

The number of dogs taken in or seized in response to the Dangerous Dogs act has remained low. 21 authorities answered this question, with all except two giving responses of fewer than ten. The most common response was just one, given by six authorities.

**54%**  
**OF STRAY**  
**DOGS WERE**  
**RETURNED**  
**TO THEIR**  
**OWNERS**



**54%**

**78%**

A yellow line-art illustration of a microchip with a circular antenna and a small display showing the number '000000'.

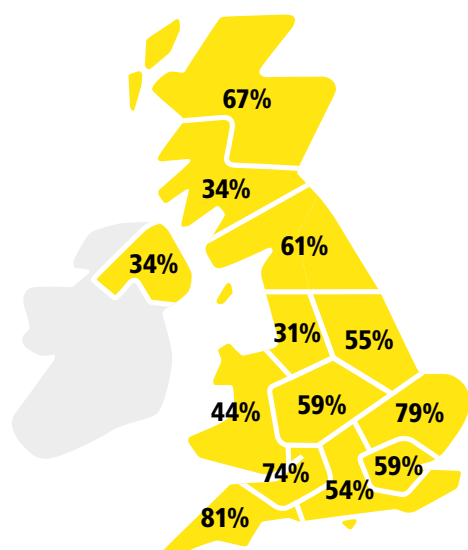
**78% OF ALL MICROCHIPPED**  
**DOGS THAT WERE UNABLE TO**  
**BE RETURNED TO THEIR OWNERS**  
**HAD INCORRECT CONTACT**  
**INFORMATION ON THEIR CHIP.**

### 3. Regional summaries

Table 4: Key estimated figures by TV region

TV region	Base	Response rate (%)	Total strays	Put to sleep	Reunited with owner	Passed on to welfare orgs	People per stray
Granada	9	26%	9,554	45	2,916	1,201	734
Yorkshire	12	57%	4,149	142	2,291	1,040	1,553
Central	29	44%	12,376	289	7,306	2,237	740
HTV	14	48%	6,917	58	3,231	1,931	804
Anglia	21	57%	7,361	86	5,800	2,897	618
Carlton	46	66%	6,504	119	3,818	1,771	1,836
Meridian	17	40%	4,437	46	2,400	678	1,367
West Country	7	41%	3,354	19	2,725	372	546
Border	3	43%	775	5	555	149	816
Grampian	2	22%	27	0	18	0	51,482
STV Central	8	38%	4,717	21	1,596	441	844
Ulster	9	82%	5,414	191	1,987	1,734	338
West	1	14%	2,100	0	1,561	154	735
Wales	13	59%	5,143	47	2,263	1,540	596
Tyne Tees & Border	9	39%	5,517	176	3,361	831	618
<b>Total*</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>69,621</b>	<b>1,303</b>	<b>37,924</b>	<b>16,453</b>	<b>1,073</b>

Dogs reunited with owners by region



Number of people per stray dog (UK average)



\*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. Please refer to section 1.4 for a fuller explanation of this.