

Stray Dogs Survey Report 2017-18



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A report prepared for Dogs Trust by:



Design: Mike Jefferies Design

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's Social Research team has been running the Stray Dogs survey since 2003 and was again commissioned to undertake the survey in 2018.

Invitations were sent to all 381 local authorities with responsibility for environmental health in the UK in the week commencing 3 September 2018.

Following postal, email and telephone reminders by both GfK and Dogs Trust over a period of five weeks, 265 questionnaires were returned by the deadline (9 October 2018), giving a response rate of 70% across the 381 councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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.

Table 1: Response rates

TV region	Authorities responding	Total authorities	Response rate
Granada (North West)	21	34	62%
Yorkshire (Yorkshire)	13	21	62%
Central (Midlands)	45	66	68%
HTV (Wales and West)	21	29	72%
Anglia (East & Anglia)	29	37	78%
Carlton (London)	56	70	80%
Meridian (Southern)	28	43	65%
West Country (South West)	12	17	71%
Border	6	7	86%
Grampian (Northern Scotland)	6	9	67%
STV Central (Central Scotland)	14	21	67%
Ulster (Northern Ireland)	6	11	55%
Wales	17	22	77%
West	4	7	57%
Tyne Tees	8	16	50%
England	221	317	70%
Scotland	21	31	68%
Northern Ireland	6	11	55%
Wales	17	22	77%
Total	265	381	70%

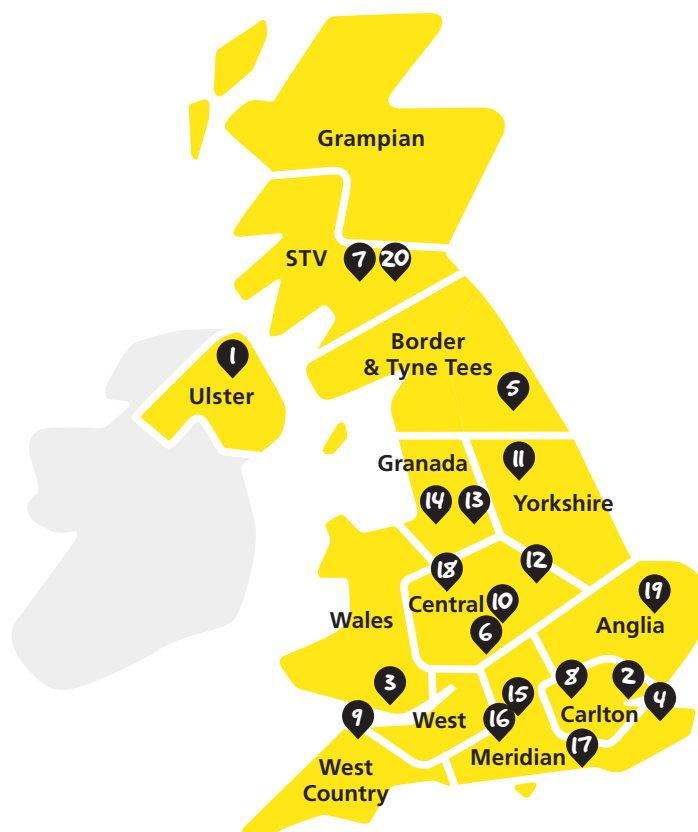
1.3 Definition of regions

The findings are analysed according to the 11 of the 13 ITV regions throughout the UK. They 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).

The map to the right shows how the regions are split across the UK, and where we have a Dogs Trust rehoming centre.

Dogs Trust centres

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



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 local authorities. 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 local authorities. 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.

Some of the findings in this report are based on the actual numbers reported by each authority, as opposed to the grossed ones. 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 to 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.

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.

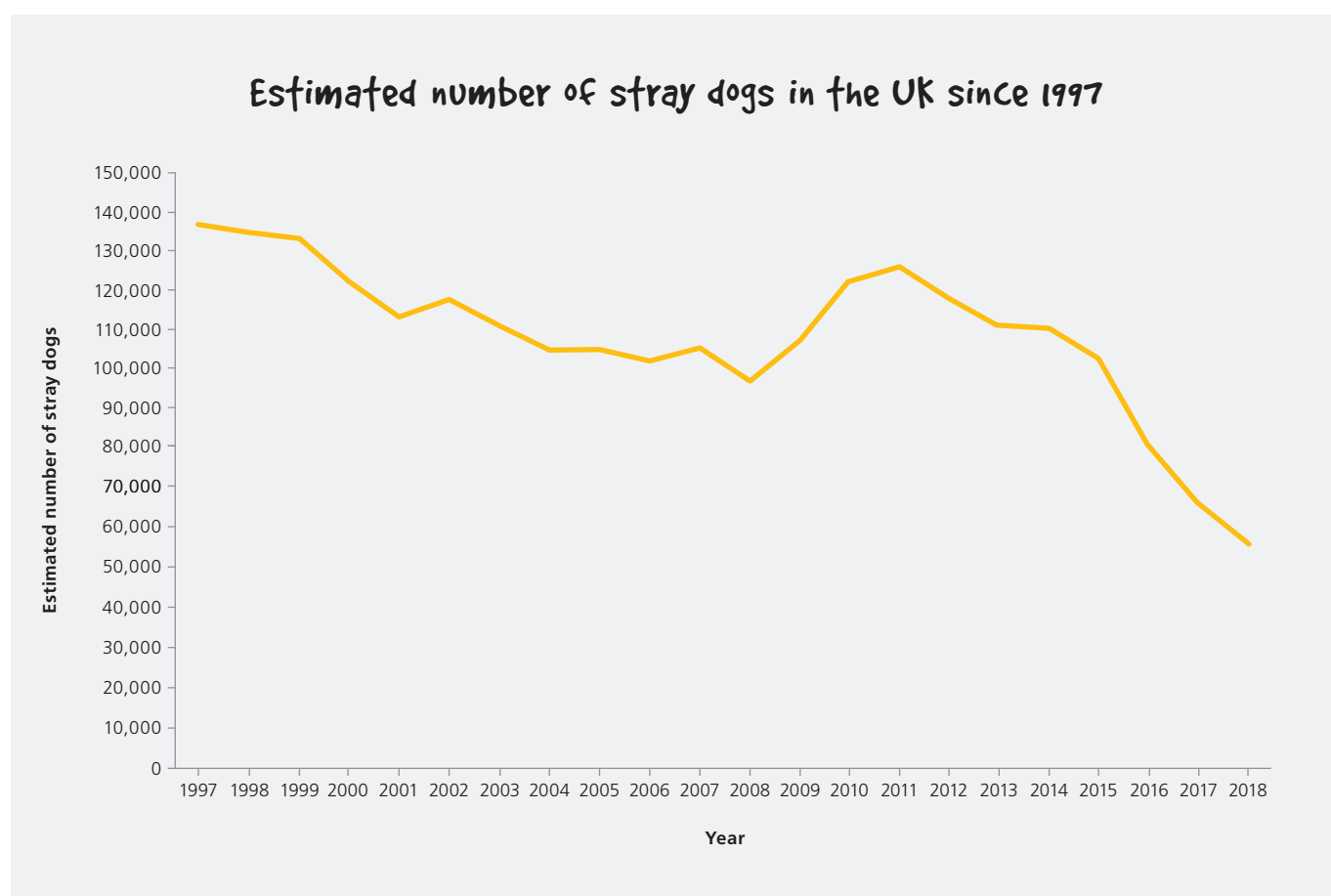
Comparisons are made with previous surveys where appropriate in this report.

2. Summary of findings

2.1 The number of stray dogs handled

Based on all 265 authorities who responded to this survey before the deadline, an estimated 56,043 stray dogs were handled by local authorities across the UK between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. This represents a 15 percentage point decrease from the estimate of 66,277 dogs handled during the same period in 2016 to 2017.

Chart 1 shows the estimated number of stray dogs handled annually across the UK since 1997. The number of stray dogs reported has declined again – for the seventh consecutive year – and it now again at its lowest point seen since the tracking began, with a slower but continued drop again this year.



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 1,334 people, which is an increase from one stray per 1,128 people in 2017. There are however significant differences within this between regions.

Unlike previous results, London no longer has the highest people to stray dogs ratio, having been just overtaken by STV this year

(one stray per 2,622 people vs 2,560 in London). The lowest ratio is seen again in Ulster (one stray to 453 people), though this has improved from 330 in 2017. 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)

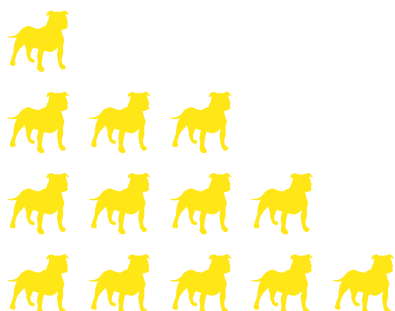
Table 2: Estimated number of people per stray dog by TV region

TV region	Estimated number of strays	Total authorities in region	Estimated strays per authority	Estimated number of people per stray
Granada	7,049	34	207	995
Yorkshire	5,867	21	279	1,098
Central	10,669	66	162	856
Anglia	3,657	37	99	1,244
Carlton	7,308	70	104	1,634
Meridian	4,598	43	107	1,319
West Country	1,441	17	85	1,272
Border	441	7	63	1,433
Grampian	1,187	9	132	1,172
STV Central	1,518	21	72	2,622
Ulster	4,048**	11	368	453
West	805	7	115	1,917
Wales	5,730	22	260	535
Tyne Tees & Border	3,412	23	148	1,000
UK Total*	56,043	381	147	1,334

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

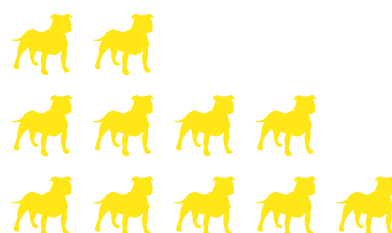
2016–17

66,277



2017–18

56,043



* 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.

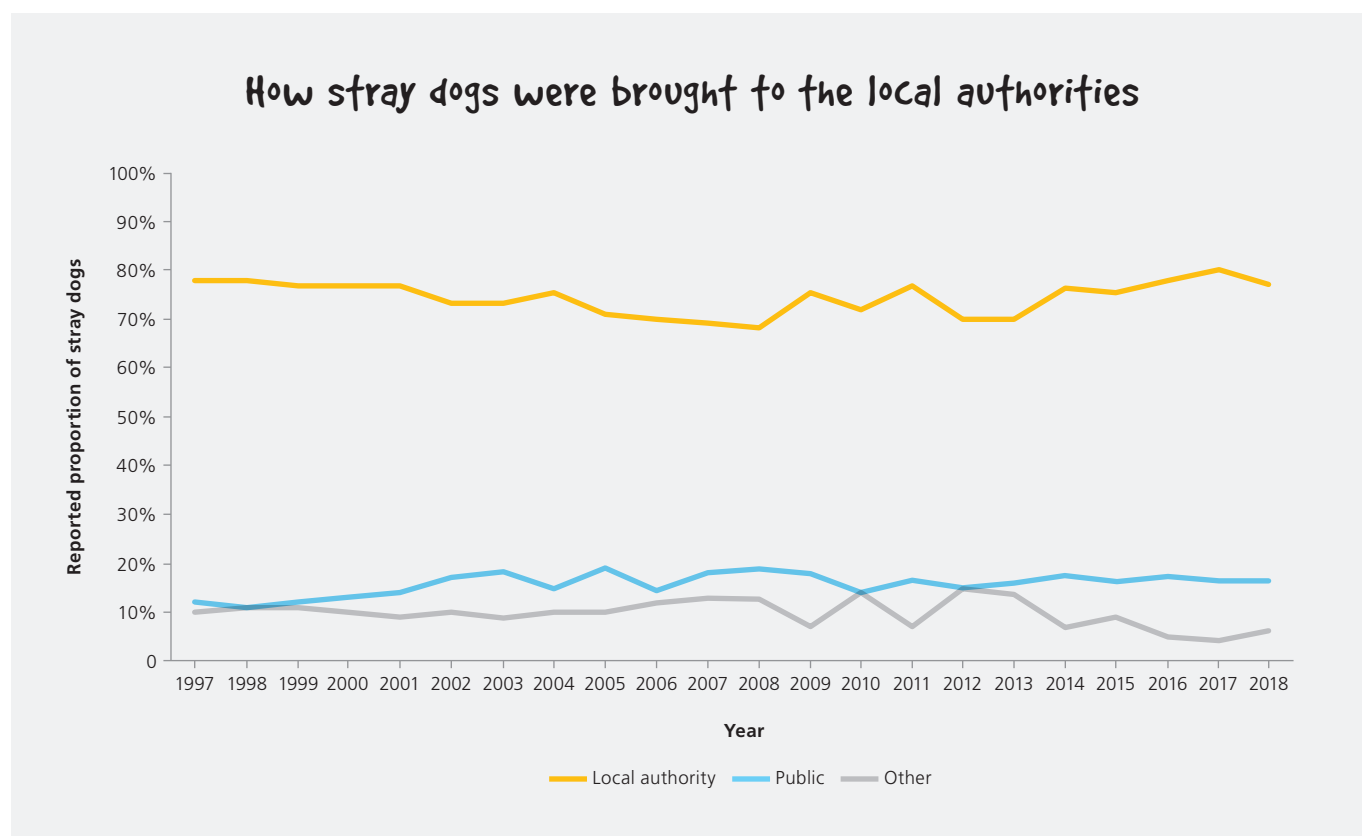
** Please note that this figure compares to an estimate of 4663 provided by the government in Northern Ireland.

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 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. 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.

In 2018, local authorities were responsible for seizing 77% of all stray dogs, in line with recent results. Sixteen per cent of stray dogs were brought in by the general public, which is also unchanged.

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: dogs brought in by the police (1%), brought in by other means (5%) and dogs already in local authority kennels on 1st April 2017 (1%) (all unchanged). Transfers from vets, the RSPCA, dog wardens, and other agencies each accounted for less than 1% of reported strays.

As in 2017, 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, 27 authorities said at least one dog was seized in response to the act (down from 38 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 2017 and 31st March 2018.

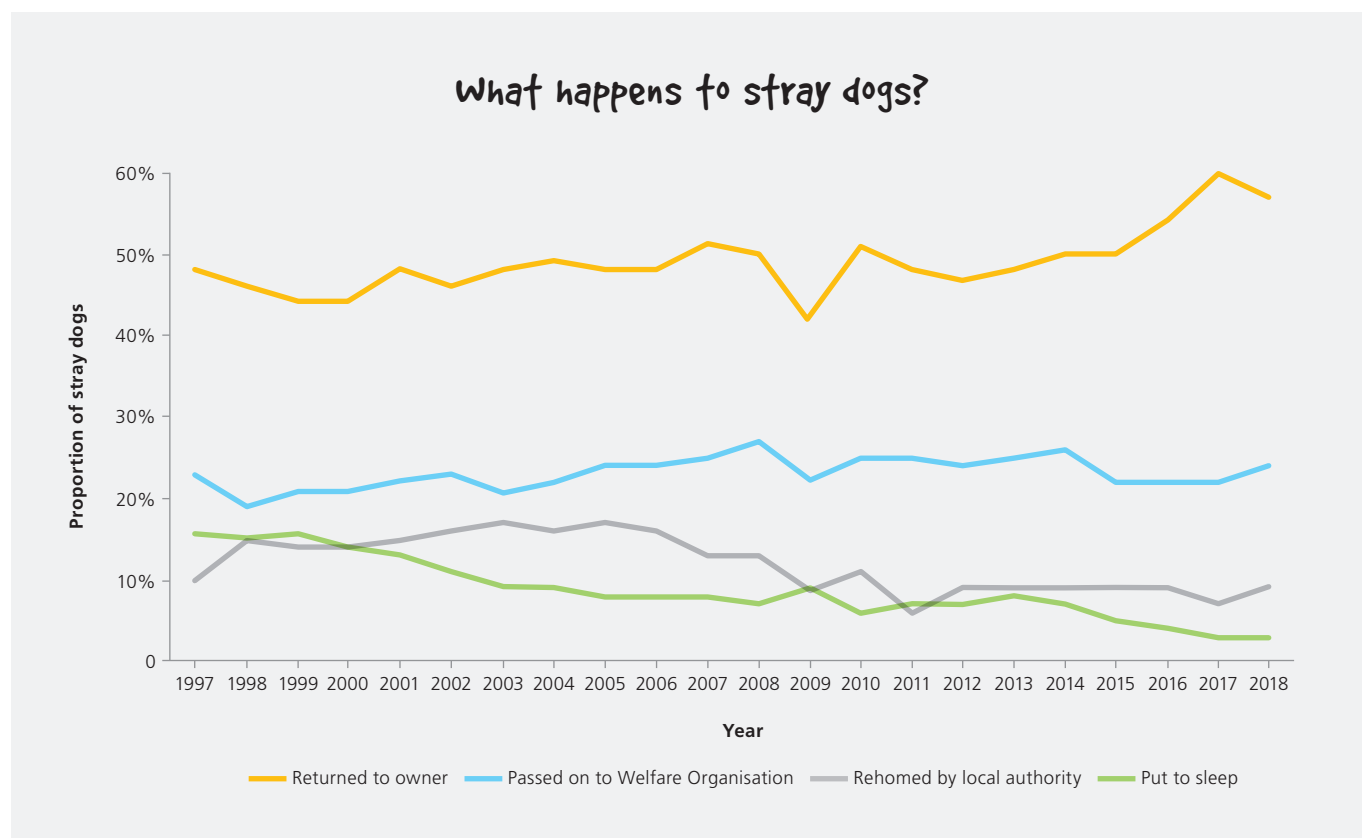
An estimated 57% of stray dogs were reunited with their owners in this period, either by being reclaimed during the statutory local authority kennelling period (37%) or returned directly to their owner without entering a kennel (20%). These figures have again remained stable this year.

An estimated 5,080 dogs were rehomed by local authorities this year, a very slight increase from 4,512 in 2017 – now accounting for 9% of all strays (compared to 7% in 2017). 24% of strays were passed onto a welfare organisation this year, stable with results seen in 2017 (22%).

The estimated proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep was 3%, unchanged since 2017. This year 1,017 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 1,462 dogs were put to sleep in total across the UK during the period of 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 – compared to an estimated 2,213 put to sleep last year.

Amongst the authorities responding, details were given for just under four fifths of reported destructions (77%). It was reported that 261 dogs were put to sleep due to ill health, 412 due to behavioural problems or aggression, 82 under the Dangerous Dogs Act (down from 206 in 2017), and 25 due to being unclaimed / 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)

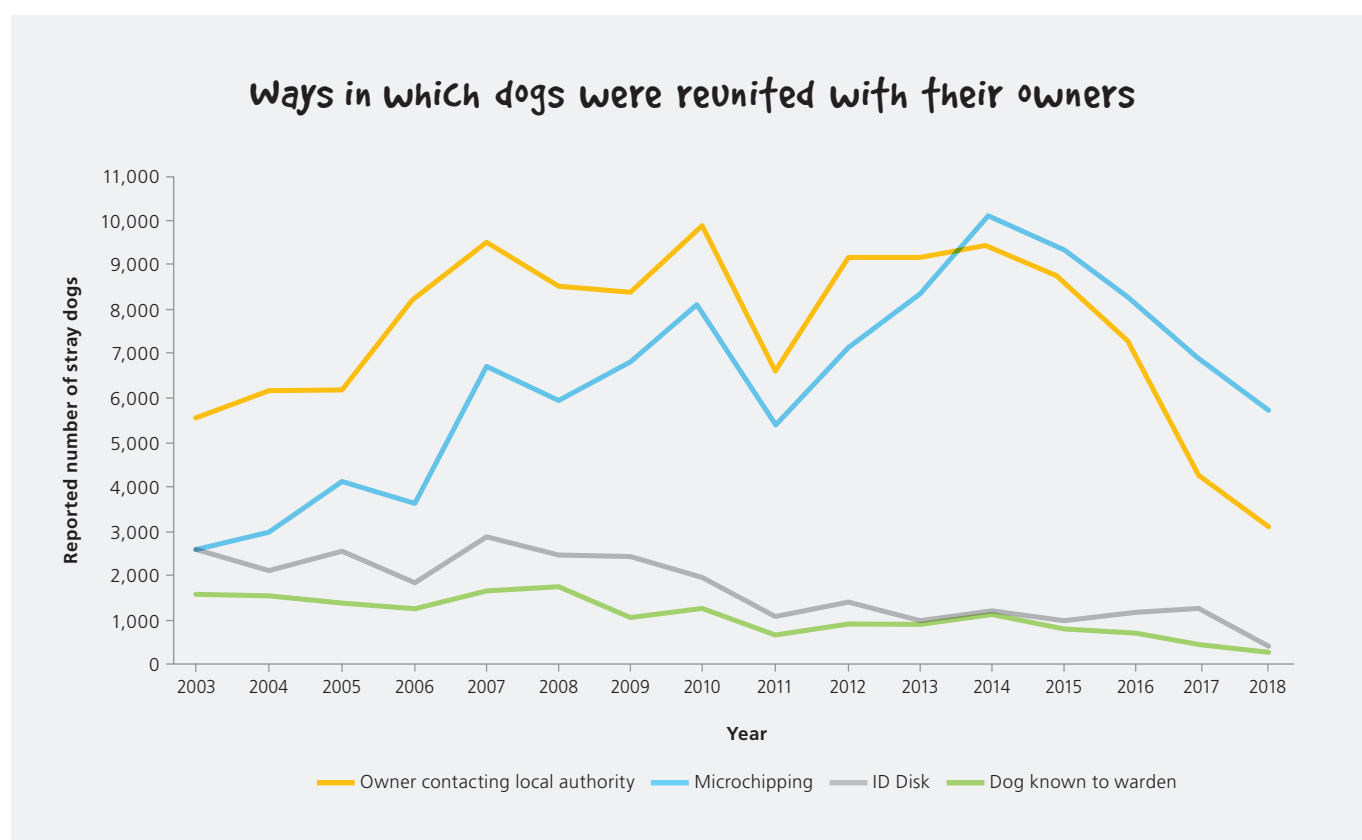
In addition to these key outcomes, 1% of strays were also reported as still being in the local authority kennels after 31st March 2018 (unchanged). A variety of other outcomes were also mentioned, including strays being kept or retained by finders and

dogs being seized by or passed onto the police. Details were not given to account for all stray dogs, with about 5% of all reported stray dogs left unaccounted for at this question.

2.4 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 owners. This year the methods responsible for reuniting dogs with their owners were given for 10,551 strays, which accounts for 47% of all dogs that were reported as being returned to or reunited with their owners (22,325).

It was reported that 3,125 dogs were reunited due to the owner contacting the local authority or pound directly – accounting for 30% of all returns (unchanged). Microchips alone accounted for 5,775 reunions, ID disks for 404 reunions and the combination of the two for 522 reunions. In addition, it was reported that 275 dogs were reunited due to already being known to the dog warden. These figures remain largely in line with previous years.



Base: All local authorities in the UK (256)

Other reasons for dogs being returned to their owners included via other kennels, including private and contractors' kennels and local veterinary surgeries, and in one case partnership with a charity.

2.5 Microchipping

This year dog wardens reported that 13,741 (35%) of the total number of stray dogs which were taken in were already microchipped¹. This compares to 18,430 (34%) of the dogs taken in last year – continuing a gradual rise over time in microchipping: from 5,920 in 2011–2012, to 10,213 in 2012–2013, to 16,443 in the 2013–2014 period², to 17,789 in the 2014–2015 period.

It was reported that of all the seized dogs who had microchips but were unable to be returned to their owners, in 75% of cases this was due to incorrect contact or owner details being registered on the chip. This is up from 69% in 2017 – another increase year on year. In 13% of cases it was due to the dog being unwanted by its owner (down from a quarter in 2017). For 12% of these dogs, it was other reasons, which included having no response from the owner.

Of the 232 local authorities that responded to the question on whether they offered a microchipping service, 96 said they offered such a service, with 28% offering it free using Dogs Trust chips, 11% offering it free at a cost to the council, and 16% requiring the owner to pay (all stable). Frequently authorities reported using a mixture, such as allowing free chipping in some cases but requiring the owner to pay in others.

As mentioned previously, the questions specifically asking about the number of dogs taken in with foreign microchips, as well as the number of microchip enforcement notices given out, were removed in 2017, so no data was collected on either of these issues.



13,741 STRAY DOGS TAKEN IN WERE ALREADY MICROCHIPPED.



75% OF ALL MICROCHIPPED DOGS THAT WERE UNABLE TO BE RETURNED TO THEIR OWNERS HAD INCORRECT CONTACT INFORMATION ON THEIR CHIP.

¹ 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 These figures should, however, be treated with some caution as details were only given for around one in five reported strays.

2.6 Current set up of dog warden services

In the 2013–14 survey, three new questions were introduced to investigate the set-up of the dog warden services in local authorities in the UK. 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 have been retained again in 2018.

In 2018, 164 local authorities (62%) said their dog warden was employed directly by them, compared to 84 authorities (32%) who contracted the service out.

204 answering authorities said that private boarding kennels handle their strays (77%); whereas 36 (14%) authorities used a council-owned pound and 70 (26%) used welfare charity

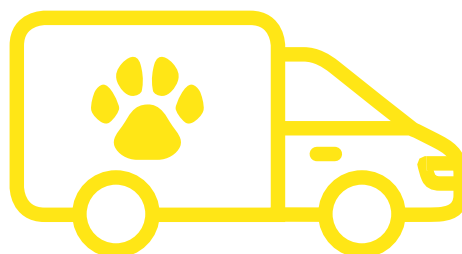
kennels to house their stray dogs. All figures remain unchanged since 2017. Seven authorities said that they use an alternative option for handling their strays.

In terms of operational hours, 258 (97%) reported that their dog warden services were operational during working hours Monday to Friday and 89 during working hours on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, 127 (48%) local authorities had a dog warden service which worked on-call out of working hours Monday to Friday and 136 authorities operated an on-call service out of hours on weekends, with 53% of all local authorities reporting offering an out-of-hours service at any time. These figures are again largely comparable with previous years.

2.7 Dangerous dogs

Since 2017, the previous question about 'status dogs' has been removed from the survey, and in its place local authorities were asked to answer about the number of dogs taken in or seized in response to the Dangerous Dogs act. Of the 54 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 (given by 11 respondents). Just three authorities gave an answer of ten or more dogs. 27 authorities answered the question saying that they either did not know or did not record the exact number.

53%



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

³ As of the 2014–15 survey, the results for these questions have been disseminated by individual TV region. Prior to this, only a minority of local authorities answered these questions so the results were not broken down as far as this. For the past three years, over 80% of local authorities gave responses here.

2.8 Conclusions

The number of stray dogs reported by UK authorities overall has decreased by an estimated 15 percentage points since 2017 (following on from an eighteen percentage point decrease between 2016 and 2017). The grossed number now stands at an estimated 56,043 stray dogs across the UK. Reported figures suggest that the majority (77%) of these dogs were seized directly by the local authority as strays, with a further 16% surrendered by the general public – both results are in line with previous figures.

57% of the estimated stray dogs taken in this year were reunited with their owners – consistent with results in 2017 (60%). 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. Just under one in ten (9%) strays were rehomed by the local authority this year.

Where methods used to return stray dogs to their owners have been identified (for 10,551 dogs this year – down from 14,309 dogs in 2017), this year it was reported that 5,775 reunions were due to the dog being microchipped, down from 6,910 in 2017. The proportion has remained more stable over recent years after a rapid increase immediately prior to 2014.

An estimated 3% of strays were put to sleep this year, in line with 2017 results and following a gradual decrease over time since 2013.

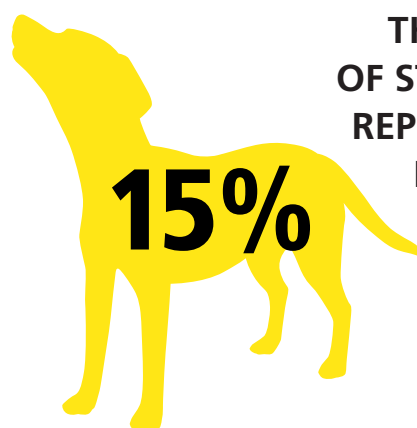
Almost all responding authorities provided information about their dog warden services this year. 62% of authorities reported that their dog warden was employed directly by them, and 32% reported contracting this service out. 77% of authorities reported using private boarding kennels for strays, and 26% welfare charity kennels (both in line with results last year). Almost all answering authorities reported that their dog warden service operated during working hours during the week (258 authorities – 97%), and 89 operating during these hours on the weekend. In addition, 127 said their service operated on-call out of working hours during the week and 136 offered this service over the weekend. 53% now offer any kind of out of hours service – in line with results seen in 2017.

The number of dogs taken in or seized in response to the Dangerous Dogs act has remained low – with responses from just 54 local authorities on this question (down from 63 in 2017). 27 of those answering were able to provide information on the number of dogs, and of these only three reported the number was ten or more. The other 27 were unable to provide information.

**57%
OF STRAY
DOGS WERE
RETURNED
TO THEIR
OWNERS.**



57%



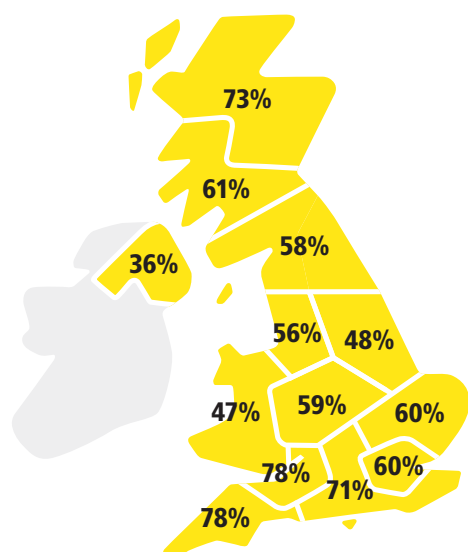
**THE NUMBER
OF STRAY DOGS
REPORTED HAS
DECREASED
BY 15%.**

3. Regional summaries

Table 3: 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	21	62%	7,049	142	3,916	1,721	995
Yorkshire	13	62%	5,867	239	2,796	1,871	1,048
Central	45	68%	10,699	364	6,462	2,017	856
HTV	21	72%	6,750	95	3,371	2,349	824
Anglia	29	78%	3,657	55	2,202	973	1,244
Carlton	56	80%	7,308	129	4,338	1,741	1,634
Meridian	28	65%	4,598	57	3,263	872	1,319
West Country	12	71%	1,441	16	1,131	174	1,272
Border	6	86%	441	1	310	107	1,433
Grampian	6	67%	1,187	41	864	108	1,172
STV Central	14	67%	1,518	23	932	290	2,622
Ulster	6	55%	4,048	334	1,441	1,153	453
West	4	57%	805	4	625	144	1,917
Wales	17	77%	5,730	87	2,700	2,095	535
Tyne Tees & Border	14	61%	3,412	76	2,011	524	1,000
Total*	265	70%	56,043	1,462	32,097	13,453	1,334

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.

4. OUR MISSION

Dogs Trust is working towards the day when all dogs can enjoy a happy life, free from the threat of unnecessary destruction. Here are just some of our achievements in 2017...

15,446



15,446 DOGS
CARED FOR AT
DOGS TRUST
REHOMING
CENTRES
IN 2017

7,000



7,000 DOGS MICROCHIPPED FOR
FREE AT OUR COMMUNITY EVENTS

7,400



OVER 7,400 FREE HEALTH
CHECKS GIVEN AT OUR
FREE 'RESPONSIBLE
DOG OWNERSHIP'
COMMUNITY EVENTS

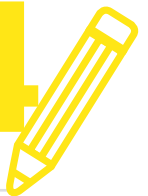


33,457

33,457 DOGS GIVEN A SUBSIDISED
OR FREE NEUTERING DOGS TRUST
VOUCHER IN 2017

340,664 LEARNERS TOOK
PART IN 8,044 DOGS TRUST
EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

340,664



92 DOGS
FOSTERED
WHILST THEIR
OWNERS FLED
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE
THROUGH
THE FREEDOM
PROJECT



1,665

WE FUNDED 1,665 TREATMENTS AND ISSUED 495
VETERINARY ENTITLEMENT CARDS TO HOMELESS
DOG OWNERS THROUGH OUR HOPE PROJECT