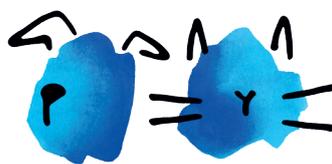




**MICROCHIPPING**

**TWO YEARS ON - 2018**

WHERE IT MATTERS MOST



**BATTERSEA**

HERE FOR EVERY DOG AND CAT

# FOREWORD

Battersea has been microchipping every dog it rehomes since the 1990s and we offer free microchipping to any dog at our three centres and at community-based events. Compulsory microchipping legislation came into force on 6 April 2016, requiring that all dogs in Great Britain must be chipped with up-to-date details. Battersea welcomed this legislation having called for compulsory microchipping for many years, reuniting 844 dogs with their owners in 2017 because their pet was microchipped. However, we wanted to know how many dogs this law was helping beyond our gates.

With the assistance of 50 Local Authorities, we compiled our first survey in 2016 to assess how many owners were already compliant with microchipping when the law came into force. The results revealed that only 20% of stray dogs seized by those Local Authorities could easily be reunited with their owners. This demonstrated that many owners hadn't yet recognised the benefits of microchipping their dog and keeping the database updated with their details.

Battersea's second survey was conducted exactly a year later in 2017, and whilst there was encouraging improvement, still only 31% of stray dogs were microchipped with accurate details recorded on the microchipping database.

Battersea's research shows that more than 7 in 10 strays cannot be easily reunited with their owners, either because the dog is not microchipped or the details on the chip are not up-to-date. This is a far cry from claims that 96% of dogs are microchipped and suggestions that the problems of pet identification are almost solved. Sadly, our research continues to show that this is not yet the case.

This is now Battersea's third report to ascertain how successful compulsory microchipping has been since its inception, and our research continues to find that improvements can still be made. In 2018, this report shows that only around one-third (29%) of stray dogs are microchipped with up-to-date details. It is clear that still more needs to be done to tackle the problem of owners failing to update their contact information.

Battersea believes microchipping databases could do more to help with the success of microchipping. This could be achieved by contacting their customers regularly and making the process of updating information as easy as possible for the customer. They could also process requests to update details as quickly as possible, to ensure the microchip details of dogs and owners are up-to-date.

Furthermore, foreign microchips have emerged as an issue in this year's report's findings which should be investigated further to determine whether this is indicative of a problem caused by the international puppy trade or a failing of the microchipping system.



**Claire Horton**, Chief Executive

\*Please note that the term keeper is used rather than owner throughout this Report, as this is the term used in Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015. It means the person with whom the dog normally resides. A dog's owner is usually its keeper but not always.

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the 51 Local Authorities and their staff who so willingly agreed to participate in this survey. We would also like to thank Mark Berry, Chair of the National Companion Animal Focus Group, for his assistance in compiling this survey and its results.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Microchipping of dogs became compulsory in England, Scotland and Wales in April 2016. It has been compulsory in Northern Ireland since 2012. In 2016 and 2017, Battersea contacted Local Authorities and requested data on the number of stray dogs they took in over a one month period, how many dogs were microchipped and whether the details were correct on the database. A year on from the law change in Great Britain, Battersea's survey in April 2017 showed some improvement in the proportion of dogs that were correctly microchipped, with accurate keeper\* details on the database.

However, this rise in compliance rates now appears to have stalled. Battersea's survey of 51 Local Authorities across the UK in April 2018, shows that

- **In April 2018 less than 1 in 3 strays (29%)** were correctly microchipped with accurate details registered on a compliant database (databases listed in appendices). This compares with:
- **April 2017, when 31% of strays** were microchipped with up-to-date details, and
- **February 2016, just before microchipping became compulsory, just 1 in 5 strays (20%)** were correctly microchipped with up-to-date details.

Unless there is a new push to raise microchipping rates, **current compliance rates look set to be the long-term picture across the UK.** In Belfast, where microchipping has been compulsory since 2012, the proportion of strays with up-to-date details on the microchip database has also hovered around 30% since Battersea began collecting this data in 2016.

There continue to be a number of problems to tackle including:

1. **35% of strays still have no microchip**
2. **New and existing keepers failing to update the microchip record**



3. **Newly microchipped dogs not being registered on the database** a smaller but growing problem, meaning that although a dog is microchipped it cannot be identified and returned home as there is no database record.
4. **Strays registered to a foreign database** – a small but significant problem if these are dogs that may have entered the country illegally, with the risks to health and safety this implies.

#### **Battersea recommends: the next steps**

Local Authorities, breeders, veterinary practices and charities should continue to raise awareness, offer free microchipping and enforce the Regulations as appropriate. However, a fresh impetus from everyone with an interest in this area is now needed to improve the percentage of dogs microchipped and ensure that details on databases are updated and correct.

**All dogs should be microchipped before sale, and it is the responsibility of the dog's initial and subsequent keepers to keep the details on the database up-to-date. Yet there is more the database companies can do,** to tackle the problem of information on the database not being updated. Activity that databases can do includes:

1. Contacting their customers regularly and systematically, to ensure their details are up-to-date
2. Making the process of updating information as easy as possible
3. Processing requests to update details as quickly as possible, within a specified timeframe

A more systematic process of information checking and updating, implemented across all database companies, would raise compliance levels and help realise the benefits of compulsory microchipping which otherwise are stalling.

# 1. BACKGROUND

On 6 April 2016, the microchipping of dogs became compulsory in England<sup>1</sup>, Scotland<sup>2</sup>, and Wales<sup>3</sup>. It has been compulsory in Northern Ireland since 9 April 2012<sup>4</sup>. The Regulations in Great Britain require that:

- Every dog must be microchipped and registered by the breeder prior to sale and by 8 weeks old<sup>5</sup>
- The keeper's details must be recorded on a compliant database and kept up-to-date

If keepers fail to comply with an enforcement notice, they can be prosecuted and fined up to £500.

Microchipping was made compulsory primarily to help dog owners get their beloved pet back home as quickly and easily as possible, and to help Local Authorities to return strays to their homes more quickly. It was estimated this would save Local Authorities and charities £15 million a year in kennelling and other costs<sup>6</sup>.

Battersea has been conducting an annual survey since 2016 to assess the impact of the legislation specifically on the stray dog population. After all it is when dogs stray that microchipping matters most. The results of the previous surveys showed:

- In 2016 just 20% of strays were correctly microchipped
- In 2017, one year after microchipping was made compulsory, 31% of stray dogs were accurately microchipped with up-to-date contact details on the database

This differs considerably from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) estimate that 96% of dogs in the UK are now microchipped<sup>7</sup>. **Battersea believes this is creating a falsely positive impression of how effective compulsory microchipping has been.** It is essential to recognise that there is still much work to do before all of the potential benefits of compulsory microchipping are realised.

So what does the picture look like in 2018, two years after the legislation came into force in Great Britain?

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2015/9780111125243>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2016/58/contents/made>

<sup>3</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/151127-microchipping-of-dogs-regulations-en.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/9/section/2>

<sup>5</sup> unless they are exempted by a vet

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2014/313/pdfs/ukia\\_20140313\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2014/313/pdfs/ukia_20140313_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/oral/86532.html>



## 2. THE MICROCHIP STATUS OF STRAY DOGS 2018

51 Local Authorities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland completed this third Battersea survey in 2018. In total, 777 stray dogs were collected, scanned and checked for this survey. The majority of these Local Authorities had also participated in both the 2016 and 2017 surveys, enabling us now to track progress and identify trends over a three-year period.

For every stray dog collected in April 2018 these Local Authorities recorded, as in previous years:

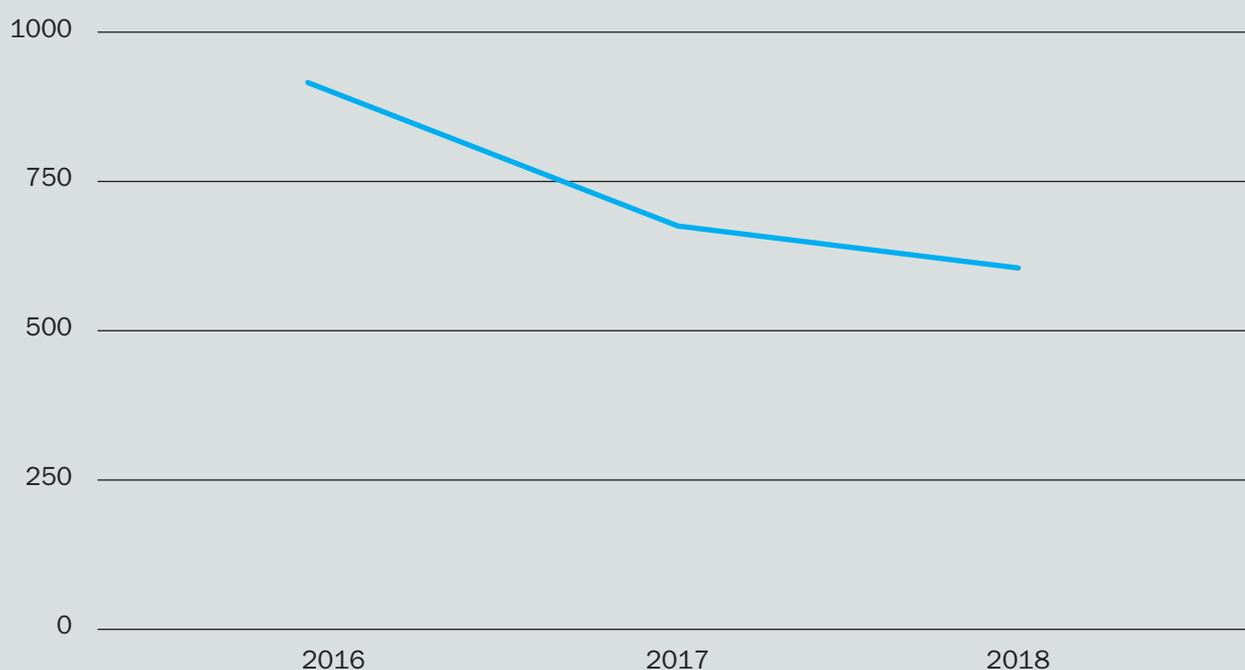
- Whether it was microchipped
- Whether the microchip record was accurate
- The reason for any inaccuracies.

This year, we additionally asked Local Authorities to record instances where a microchip was registered to a foreign database. Councils also recorded whether the dog was wearing a collar and tag<sup>8</sup> with accurate contact details, as this remains a legal requirement for any dog in a public place. Battersea would like to thank all of these Local Authorities for their work in compiling this data.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1992/901/contents/made>

### FIGURE 1

Number of strays collected by the Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales who participated in all Battersea surveys 2016-18



### Reducing strays

This year's survey shows a continuing **reduction in the number of stray dogs** handled by Local Authorities. Looking at the data collected from 44 Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales who participated in all three surveys 2016-2018, and who also provide figures before and after compulsory microchipping was introduced, the number of stray dogs collected has reduced from 969 in February 2016 to 651 in April 2018, **a reduction of 33% in two years.**

This trend does seem, at least in part, due to compulsory microchipping. Organisations that have scanners to read microchips, such as veterinary practices and charities, are now able to reunite more found dogs with their keepers directly. Local Authorities would not be involved if these dogs were reunited quickly, so the number of strays they take in would reduce.

There is also an increasing trend of people using social media sites to try and reunite found dogs with their owners. In some areas, local groups have been set up specifically to provide a social media-based reunite service for lost and found dogs. Whilst this reduces the burden on Local Authorities (and costs for keepers who avoid Local Authority fees), it opens up opportunities for fraud and theft if the identity of dogs and keepers cannot be checked reliably. It may also expose finders to prosecution if they fail to take a dog to the Local Authority if they haven't been able to return the dog home immediately.



### How many strays can be accurately identified?

In 2018, in England, Scotland and Wales:

- **Only 65% of strays had a microchip**
- **Only 29% of strays** collected by Local Authorities were accurately microchipped, with an up-to-date database record enabling them to be identified and returned home
- **Only 2% of strays** had a collar & tag with accurate information on the tag

This means that **more than 7 in 10 strays still cannot be easily and simply reunited with their owner through a microchip** (which is both compulsory and can in some areas be inserted for free).

### Is the situation improving?

Unfortunately, no. Figure 2 compares the results for 2016, 2017 and 2018, focusing only on the 44 Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales that provided figures for every year.

2017 saw a significant improvement in accurate microchipping of strays in the first year after it became compulsory. However, there has been no further improvement in 2018. Indeed it has got marginally worse.

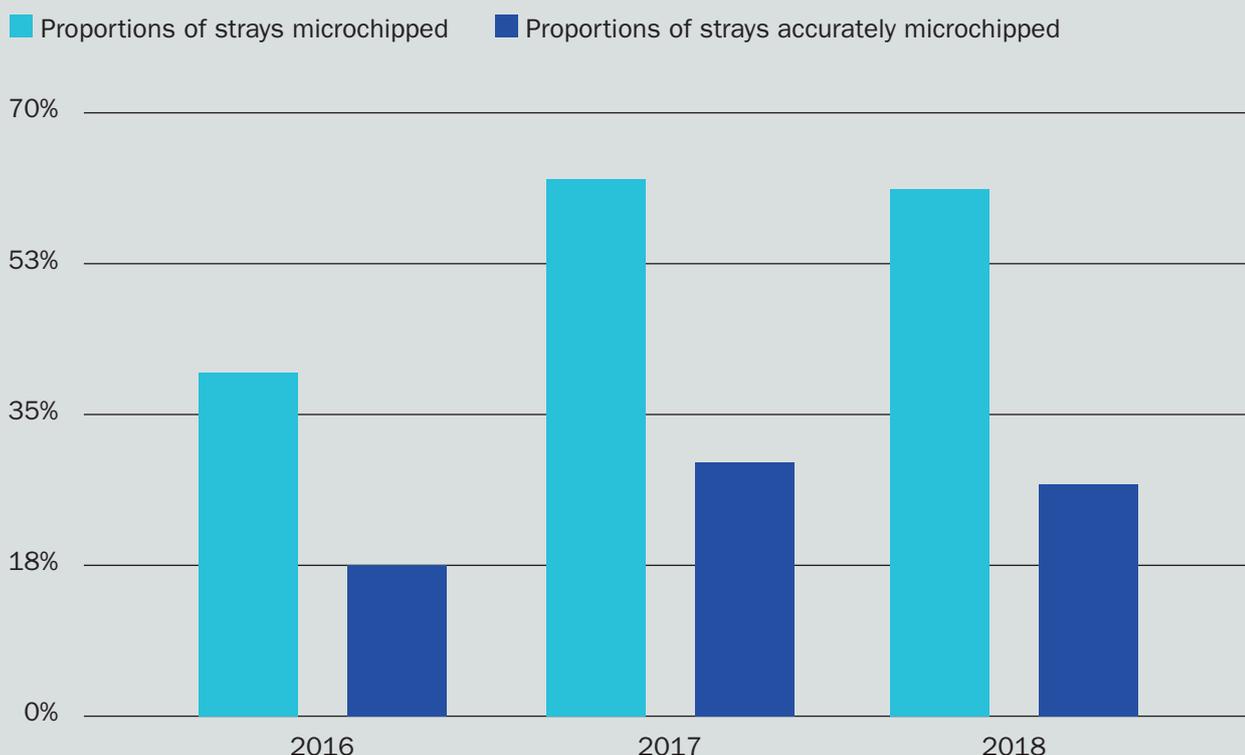
### What are the problems?

35% of strays in our 2018 UK sample still have no microchip.

Of those strays that are fitted with a microchip, 55% have inaccurate information on the database which makes it very difficult to get them back home. Looking more closely at this group, Figure 3 shows the proportion falling into different groups, revealing the reasons for the inaccurate records. Figure 3 again focuses on the 44 Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales that participated in all three surveys 2016-2018.

### FIGURE 2

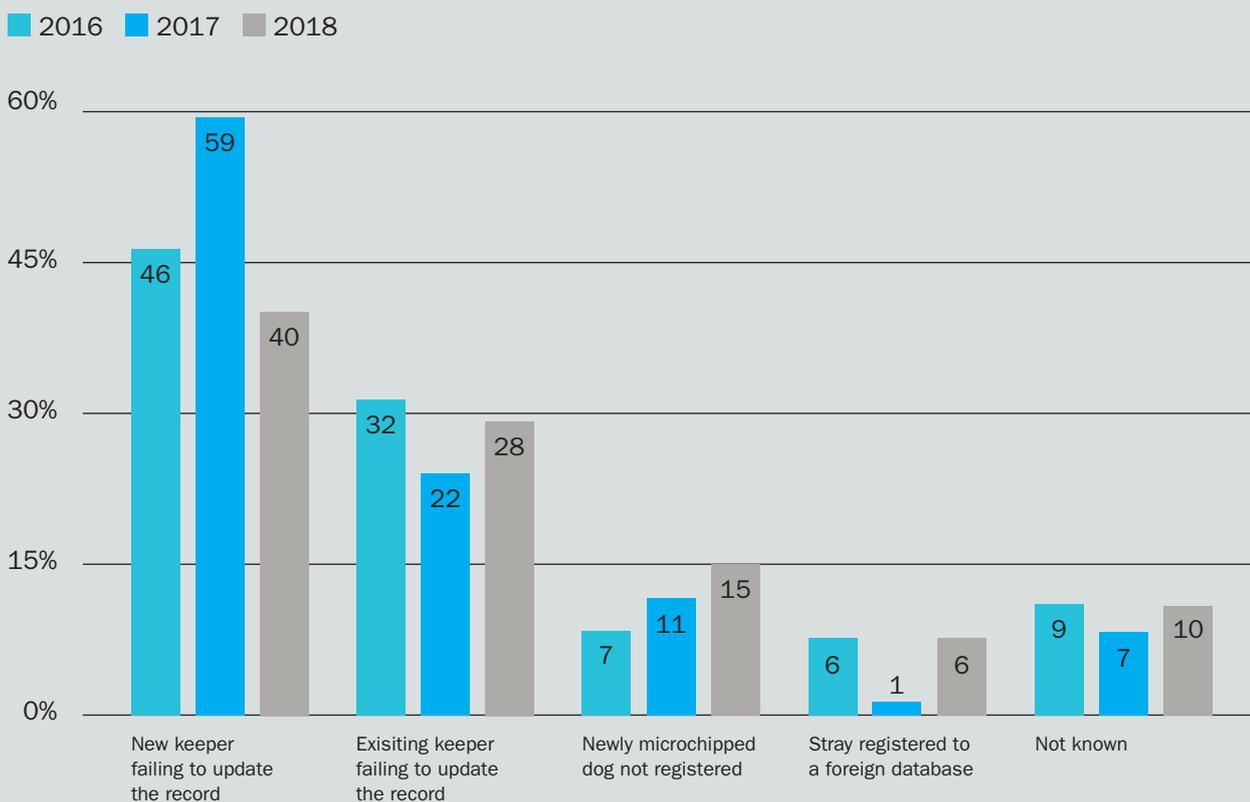
The microchip status of stray dogs in Great Britain in 2016-2018



There are a number of different problems affecting the accuracy of the microchip database:

- New keepers failing to update the microchip record with their name and contact details. 40% of inaccurately registered strays (97 dogs) fell into this category in 2018. This remains the biggest problem, although there are signs that this is improving with a reduction in the percentage failing to update the register
- Existing keepers changing their address or phone number, and not updating the record. The next largest problem, making up 28% of inaccurately registered strays in 2018 (68 dogs), and showing little sign of improvement
- Newly microchipped dogs not being registered on the database. A relatively small problem, but it is getting steadily worse. Up from 7% of inaccurately registered strays in 2016 (16 dogs) to 15% in 2018 (37 dogs)
- Strays registered to a foreign database. Local Authorities had previously commented informally on cases where strays had been microchipped but registered to a foreign database. In 2018, we have been able to quantify this problem more systematically. There were 15 dogs in this category, and in 11 cases the Local Authority could not find where the dog lived. Although a small number, it is significant if this flags dogs that are likely to have come into this country illegally or as victims of the international puppy trade, with all the risks to health and safety this implies
- The use of non-compliant or foreign microchips. A growing problem that should be investigated and addressed. Microchips should be obtained through a reputable source, such as a member of the Microchip Trade Association

**FIGURE 3**  
Percentage of inaccurately registered stray dogs falling into different groups





### 3. CONCLUSIONS

This report and its findings shows that the initial impact of compulsory microchipping is tailing off.

- There has been a marginal, but worrying, reduction in the microchip status of stray dogs. Only 29% of strays in 2018 were accurately microchipped, so the dog could be easily reunited with its home, compared with 31% of dogs in 2017.
- Compulsory microchipping continues to contribute to the reduction in strays handled by Local Authorities in 2017, as it enables charities, veterinary practices and other organisations with scanners to return more found dogs to their homes more easily. This effect has, however, slowed.

In Belfast (where microchipping has been compulsory since 2012), the proportion of strays that are accurately microchipped, with correct details on the database, has stayed around 30% since Battersea started collecting the figures in 2016. **Unless there is concerted action to improve the situation, this looks set to be the long-term picture for the rest of the UK.**

#### Next steps

Local Authorities, charities and veterinary practices have been very active in encouraging owners to microchip their dogs through awareness-raising campaigns and free microchipping events. The Lost Dogs & Cats Line<sup>9</sup> takes records of missing pets and compares them to notices of found pets locally to reunite them with their owners.

**The enforcement work of Local Authorities has to continue.** By April 2017, Local Authorities issued 2,751 enforcement notices, with offenders who have failed to comply receiving an average penalty of £350<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> If you have lost or found a dog or cat, please make a report to our Lost Dogs & Cats Line on 020 7627 9245. Open 8am to 7pm

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.express.co.uk/news/nature/822416/dog-microchipped-pets-fine-warning>

This work has helped raise compliance levels to what they are today. Yet it should continue as 35% of strays still have no microchip.

**However fresh impetus is needed across the board**, particularly to tackle the problem of keepers failing to update their information on the database.

**Can the database companies do more?**

We have previously suggested that the database companies might be able to do more. **Now is the time for this to be pursued more vigorously.**

The scope for action should be urgently reviewed. This might include:

- Contacting their customers regularly and systematically, to ensure their details are up-to-date
- Making the process of updating information as easy as possible
- Processing requests to update details as quickly as possible, within a specified timeframe

Some companies already undertake this activity. A more systematic process of information checking and updating implemented across all database companies would raise compliance levels, and help maximise the benefits of compulsory microchipping.

If all of these different groups work together and play their part, we can see more dogs identified and returned to their homes more quickly.



# WHO CAN HELP TO IMPROVE MICROCHIPPING RATES?

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- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Local Authorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Continue to raise awareness of, and enforce, the microchipping regulations</li><li>▪ Work with keepers to ensure they are complying with the law</li><li>▪ Work with vets to promote compliance with the law</li></ul> |
|-------------------|--|
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|--------------------|--|
| Database companies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Contact keepers regularly and systematically to ensure their details are up-to-date</li><li>▪ Make the process of updating information as easy as possible</li><li>▪ Process requests to update details within clearly defined time frames</li></ul> |
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|----------------------|--|
| Keepers and breeders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Ensure they microchip and register their dogs on a compliant database, in accordance with the law</li><li>▪ Update database companies with any change in their contact details</li></ul> |
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|------|---|
| Vets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Advise clients of their legal duty to ensure their details are correctly registered with a compliant database</li><li>▪ Routinely offer to register or update the database on behalf of their clients</li><li>▪ Inform the Local Authority if they take possession of a stray dog</li></ul> |
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|---------|---|
| Finders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Contact their Local Authority (or the Police in Scotland) upon finding a stray dog, as opposed to solely trying to reunite the dog via social media</li></ul> |
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|-------------------------------------|--|
| Charities and welfare organisations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Continue to provide free microchipping</li><li>▪ Advise the public of the need to keep their details up-to-date</li><li>▪ Work with a range of partners, e.g. Royal Mail, vets and Councils, to promote messages around keeping their details up-to-date</li></ul> |
|-------------------------------------|--|
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|-------|--|
| DEFRA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Continue education and awareness building around the requirement of compulsory microchipping</li><li>▪ Investigate the issue of foreign microchips</li></ul> |
|-------|--|
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# APPENDIX: LOCAL AUTHORITIES THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE BATTERSEA SURVEY 2018

|                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Barking & Dagenham   | Hyndburn*           |
| Barnet*              | Inverclyde*         |
| Barnsley*            | Isle of Wight*      |
| Basildon*            | Islington*          |
| Basingstoke & Deane* | Lambeth*            |
| Bassetlaw            | Lewisham*           |
| Belfast*             | Manchester*         |
| Birmingham City*     | Newham*             |
| Bradford*            | North Lincolnshire* |
| Brighton & Hove*     | Northumberland      |
| Broxbourne*          | Portsmouth*         |
| Camden*              | Reading*            |
| Cardiff*             | Richmond (London)   |
| Chorley*             | Rotherham*          |
| Coventry*            | Rushmoor*           |
| Croydon*             | Sheffield*          |
| Durham*              | Southampton*        |
| East Hampshire*      | Southend on Sea*    |
| Eastleigh*           | Stockton on Tees*   |
| Hackney              | Test Valley*        |
| Harrogate*           | Trafford*           |
| Hart*                | Wandsworth*         |
| Havant*              | West Lancashire*    |
| Hillingdon*          | Westminster         |
| Hounslow*            | Winchester*         |
| Hull*                |                     |

\* Local Authorities who also participated in Battersea 2016 and 2017 microchipping surveys.

# APPENDIX: CURRENT DEFRA COMPLIANT MICROCHIPPING DATABASES (CORRECT 24 JULY 2018)

Animal Tracker

Chipworks

Identibase

MicroChip Central

MicroDogID

National Veterinary Data Service

Pet Identity UK

Petlog

ProtectedPet

Smartchip

UK PETtrac



## **Further Information**

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LONDON SW8 4AA

### **BATTERSEA OLD WINDSOR**

PRIEST HILL, OLD WINDSOR  
BERKSHIRE SL4 2JN

### **BATTERSEA BRANDS HATCH**

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