

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home 2017

# Microchipping where it matters most - One year on



# Foreword

When microchipping became compulsory for dogs in England, Scotland and Wales in April 2016, Battersea published a report surveying the stray dogs coming into 50 diverse Local Authorities across the UK, to assess the extent of the problem. This revealed that only 20% of the stray dogs in the care of those Local Authorities could be happily returned home thanks to an up to date microchip.

So, one year on from this milestone piece of legislation, it was important to see if this alarmingly low statistic had in any way improved, now that all dog owners must have their dogs chipped.

Battersea takes in nearly 4,000 dogs across our three centres each year. Of the 1075 dogs we were able to reunite with their owners in 2016, many were returned quickly and easily thanks to their microchip.

If every dog had an up to date microchip, strays would not suffer unnecessary separation from their owners, irresponsible owners would be more easily traced, and rescue centres like Battersea could free up more kennel space, more quickly, for more animals to come into our care.

In this second report, “Microchipping where it matters most – One year on” Battersea found a slightly encouraging picture, but there is still so much more work to be done.

65% of strays were microchipped, which is a significant increase on the 2016 figure before the law change. But – and it is a significant but - for too many stray dogs their chip was redundant, as only around half of those with a chip had up to date details available on any UK microchipping database.

This Battersea Report suggests some practical and simple measures for improvement. These include all vets explaining the law fully to their clients, and members of the public handing strays in to Local Authorities.

Clearly, there is no one silver bullet to achieve a solution but if charities, Local Authorities, vets and dog owners work together with a shared goal, and follow the recommendations made in this report, Battersea believes many more dogs could be returned home more quickly and everyone will benefit.



**Claire Horton**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Battersea Dogs & Cats Home**

**Cover dog: Barney**





## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the 53 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.



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# Executive Summary

Microchipping of dogs became compulsory in England, Wales and Scotland in April 2016. To coincide with this law change, Battersea surveyed 50 Local Authorities to establish whether the strays they collected in February 2016 could be identified by a microchip. Battersea's 2016 survey found:

- 45% of strays were fitted with a microchip
- only 20% of dogs could easily be returned home have accurate details on the microchip.

This second Battersea survey, carried out with 53 Local Authorities in April 2017 found:

- **65% of strays were fitted with a microchip (up from 45% in 2016)**
- **31% of strays could easily be returned home, having accurate keeper\* details on a compliant microchip database (up from 20% in 2016\*\*).**

Whilst this is an improvement, the proportion of strays correctly microchipped is still nowhere near the 95% compliance rate for all dogs in the UK claimed by DEFRA in April 2017<sup>1</sup>. In short, the aims of compulsory microchipping have not yet been achieved.

Battersea's research shows that there are four principal problems that need tackling:

1. 35% of strays still have no microchip
2. Newly microchipped dogs not being registered on the database
3. Updates to the database not being made after a dog has been sold or given away
4. Failure to update records with a change of address or phone number.

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

- All stray dogs must be taken to the Local Authority if they cannot be returned home immediately
- All database companies should contact their customers regularly and systematically to check their record is correct, as some already do.
- Microchip implanters, such as Local Authorities, charities and vets, should automatically register details on the database on behalf of the keeper.
- Local Authorities, charities, vets and others should continue to offer free microchipping where possible, as this makes a significant difference.
- Keepers must update the database with their details when they get a new dog or their details change.

\*Please note that the term keeper is used rather than owner, 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.

\*\*2017 microchipping figures apply to England, Wales and Scotland only.

# 1. Background

## **Compulsory microchipping of dogs**

On 6 April 2016, microchipping of dogs became compulsory in England<sup>2</sup>, Scotland<sup>3</sup>, and Wales<sup>4</sup>. This has been compulsory in Northern Ireland since 9 April 2012<sup>5</sup>. Battersea has long felt this change was necessary and welcomed the decisions of the different governments to take action.

The microchipping regulations require that:

- every dog by eight weeks old must be microchipped and registered on a compliant database, unless they are exempted by a vet on health grounds<sup>6</sup>
- the keeper's details must be recorded accurately on the database and kept up-to-date, otherwise the dog is not considered microchipped and enforcement action can be taken
- breeders must microchip, and register themselves on the database as the first keeper before puppies can be sold or given away.

If keepers fail to microchip their dogs or fail to keep their details on the database up to date, Local Authorities or the police can serve a notice giving them 21 days to do so.

If they do not, enforcers can:

- take possession of the dog to microchip it themselves and recover the costs from the keeper
- prosecute keepers who would then be liable to a fine of up to £500<sup>7</sup>.

Anyone who sells their dogs without microchipping them is also liable to prosecution and a fine of up to £500.

## **Compliance rates before compulsory microchipping**

The animal welfare sector, Local Authorities, vets and charities put in a good deal of effort to prepare the public for the legislation, extensively publicising the law change and offering to microchip dogs free of charge. Battersea, in common with many other charities, has been microchipping every dog it rehomes since the 1990s.

Compulsory microchipping enables Local Authorities to reunite strays with their owners more quickly. It was estimated this would save Local Authorities and charities an estimated £15 million a year in kennelling and other costs<sup>8</sup>.

It is in the stray dog population where microchipping really matters – these are the dogs where the microchip is needed to get them back home as quickly as possible. Battersea's first national survey of microchipping of stray dogs, conducted in February 2016, revealed a troubling picture. Of the 1,154 stray dogs collected by 50 Local Authorities, one month prior to the law coming into force:

- 45% of strays were fitted with a microchip
- only 20% of strays could easily be returned home, having accurate keeper details on a compliant database.

Considerable effort has been put into getting owners to microchip their dogs by charities, Government, vets and others. However, it is equally important that microchip records are kept up to date, as keepers change or move home. Unless a dog is microchipped and the details on the register are up to date, the dog is less likely to be returned home and the anticipated benefits will not be achieved.

So, one year since microchipping became compulsory, has the situation improved?



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

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

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

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

6. There are two exemptions to the 8 week requirement : (a) for a working dog that has been lawfully docked, the keeper has 3 months from the date of the date of the docking (only for England & Wales), and (b) for an imported dog, the importer has 30 days from the dog's arrival to re-register onto a complaint database.

7. This enforcement practice relates to England, Scotland and Wales only.

8. [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)



## 2. Survey findings – the microchip status of stray dogs 2017

53 Local Authorities across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland completed this second Battersea survey of stray dogs. These included 49 of the 50 Local Authorities who took part in the 2016 survey\*.

For every stray dog collected in April 2017, these Local Authorities recorded whether it was microchipped, whether the microchip record was accurate and if not, why not. In total, from the 53 Local Authorities in 2017, 868 stray dogs were collected, scanned and checked.

This survey reveals a substantial reduction in the number of stray dogs handled by Local Authorities. Comparing the 49 Local Authorities who participated in both the 2016 and 2017 survey, the number of stray dogs collected has reduced from 1,106 to 844 – a reduction of 24%.

There are a number of possible reasons for this, but two are consistently mentioned by Local Authorities, both of which are relevant to the implementation of compulsory microchipping.

### 1. Microchipping

Local Authorities believe that increased microchipping has contributed at least in part to the reduction in their stray dog figures. It has enabled people other than Local Authorities, such as vets and charities who have scanners to read the microchip and reunite found dogs with their keepers, without the Local Authority ever getting involved.

### 2. Reuniting via social media

People are increasingly 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 service for lost and found dogs. Whilst this reduces the burden on Local Authorities (and costs for keepers who avoid fees), it carries real risks, such as:

- members of the public are less able to check the identity of dogs and their keepers, and this enables people to wrongly claim dogs as their own
- they are also hindering any opportunity for the Local Authority to check compliance with microchipping regulations and take enforcement or other action to change owner's behaviour in the future
- finders who are unable to immediately return a dog to its home are committing an offence if they fail to take the dog to the Local Authority (or the Police in Scotland).

\*See appendix for full list of Local Authorities.



*“Social media has a large part to play these days. People who find dogs often post them on social media sites and the owner contacts them direct, thus less dogs are going through the Council. In some ways this is a good thing but, of course, it means that microchips are not checked so owners’ details are not checked.”*

**Dave Griffiths**

**Senior Animal Welfare Officer, Winchester City Council**

*“We don’t believe there are fewer strays out there, its just the public take matters into their own hands more and advertise that they have found dogs on social media sites. We constantly ask people not to do this, and it has undoubtedly led to people that are not the true owners collecting the dog*

**Christina Heeley**

**Senior Trading Standards and Animal Health Officer,  
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council**

### How many strays have accurate microchip records?

Focusing on Local Authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, this analysis assesses the impact of the compulsory microchipping regulations introduced in April 2016. Figure 1 shows the results<sup>9</sup>.

**Figure 1 The microchip status of stray dogs in Great Britain in 2016 and 2017, before and one year after microchipping became compulsory**

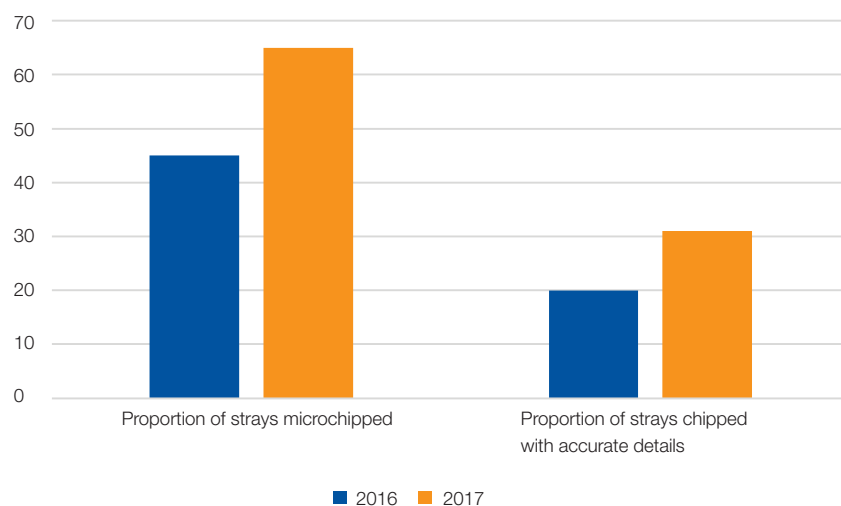


Figure 1 shows:

- an increase in the proportion of stray dogs that have a microchip – up from 45% to 65%
- an increase in the proportion of stray dogs that are correctly microchipped, with accurate keeper details on the database – up from 20% to 31%.

However, there has been little improvement in the proportion of microchipped dogs that are correctly registered, with 53% of microchips still showing inaccurate keeper details on the database (56% in 2016). Figure 2 shows the nature of these inaccuracies.

<sup>9</sup>. This section of analysis does not include Northern Ireland.



**Figure 2**  
**Inaccuracies on the microchip database**

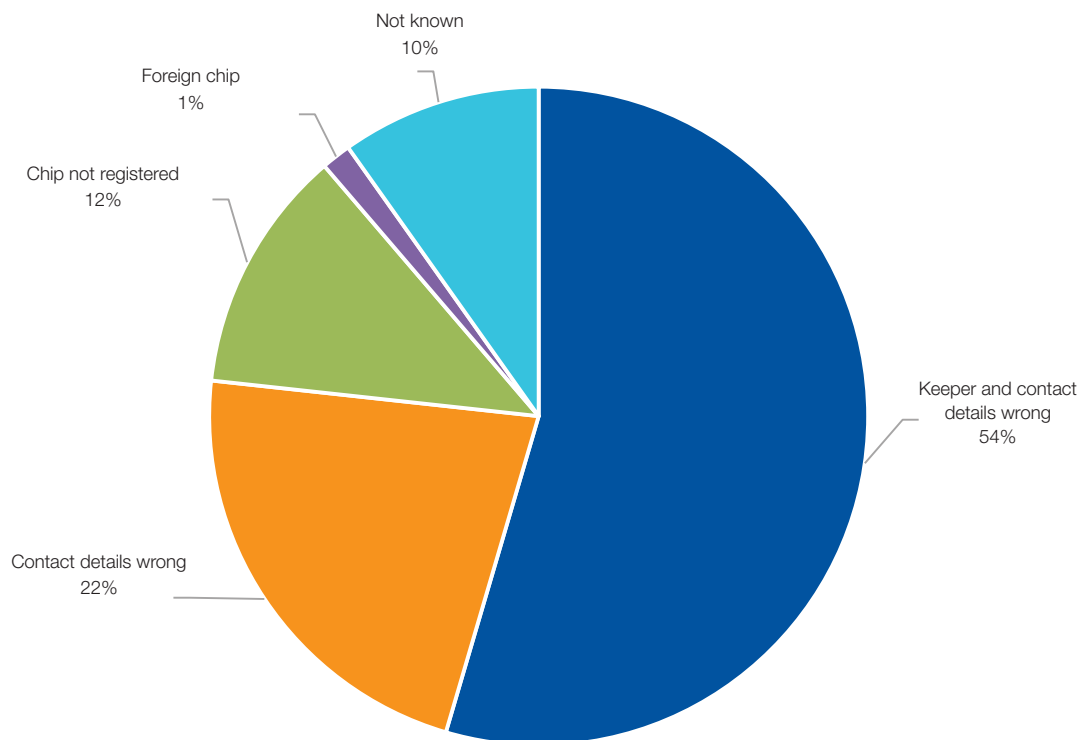


Figure 2 reveals the three main problems:

- **Change of keepership:** In more than half the incidences where there were inaccuracies, the keeper had changed. This indicates a failure of keepers to update the database when they get a new dog
- **Failure to update the record:** In 22% of cases, the keeper's name was correct but not the phone number and/or address on the record
- **Chip not registered on a compliant database:** In 12% of cases the dog was implanted with a microchip but the keeper had not registered their details with a compliant database.

# 3. Implications and next steps

DEFRA estimated in April 2017 that 95% of dogs in the UK are now microchipped<sup>10</sup>. This is not the picture that Local Authorities see, where microchipping really matters.

It is welcome that the proportion of strays collected by Local Authorities that are correctly microchipped has increased from 20% to 31% in just over one year. However, this is still a disappointingly low number compared to what is needed to achieve the anticipated benefits of compulsory microchipping.

## What needs to happen next?

Publicity, enforcement activity, vets and charities routinely offering to register the microchip details and free microchipping offers have all helped to increase the proportion of strays that are implanted with a microchip, from 45% to 65%. This work must continue.

However, there is still more work to be done beyond the initial implanting of the microchip. Half of all microchipped dogs in both our 2016 and 2017 surveys had inaccurate keeper details. This means that even if 100% of strays were microchipped, only 50% could be reunited based on the microchip record alone. This problem is putting the brakes on efforts to raise compliance rates.

There are four problems that need to be tackled:

1. 35% of strays still have no microchip
2. Newly microchipped dogs not being registered on the database
3. Updates to the database not being made after a dog has been sold or given away
4. Failure to update records with a change of address or phone number.

## Who has a role to play?

There is no one solution to these issues. All those involved in microchipping have a role to play to help resolve these problems and to increase the number of dogs which are accurately microchipped.

<sup>10</sup>. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chip-your-dog-and-check-your-chip>



### Who can help to improve microchipping rates?

<b>Local Authorities</b>	<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>
<b>Charities and welfare organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to provide free microchipping</li> <li>• Advise owners 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 accurate.</li> </ul>
<b>Vets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise their 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>
<b>Keepers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure they microchip and register their dogs in accordance with the law</li> <li>• Update database companies of any change in their contact details</li> <li>• Register their dog(s) and its microchip(s) with a compliant database.</li> </ul>
<b>Finders</b>	<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 find the keeper via social media.</li> </ul>
<b>Database Companies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow Local Authorities to check whether the records of a dog are correct and, if not, ensuring it is updated</li> <li>• Contact keepers regularly and systematically to ensure their details are up to date and making updates as easy as possible</li> <li>• Process requests to update details within clearly defined time frames.</li> </ul>





# Appendix: Local Authorities that participated in the Battersea survey 2017

Barking & Dagenham  
Barnet\*  
Barnsley\*  
Basildon\*  
Basingstoke & Deane\*  
Belfast\*  
Birmingham City\*  
Bradford\*  
Brighton & Hove\*  
Broxbourne\*  
Camden\*  
Cardiff\*  
Chorley\*  
Coventry\*  
Croydon\*  
Durham\*  
East Hampshire\*  
Eastleigh\*  
Fareham\*  
Gosport\*  
Hackney  
Harrogate\*  
Hart\*  
Havant\*  
Hillingdon\*  
Hounslow\*  
Hull\*

Hyndburn\*  
Inverclyde\*  
Isle of Wight\*  
Islington\*  
Lambeth\*  
Lewisham\*  
Manchester\*  
New Forest\*  
Newham\*  
North Lincolnshire\*  
Northumberland\*  
Portsmouth\*  
Reading\*  
Richmond (London)  
Rotherham\*  
Rushmoor\*  
Sheffield\*  
Southampton\*  
Southend on Sea\*  
Stockton on Tees\*  
Test Valley\*  
Trafford\*  
Wandsworth\*  
West Lancashire\*  
Westminster  
Winchester\*

\* Local Authorities who also participated in Battersea's 2016 microchipping survey.

## Further Information

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