



Stray dog survey report 2023-24

Contents

Introduction 1

Background and objectives 1

Methodology 2

Summary of findings 3

Response rate 3

The number of dogs handled 4

How do dogs arrive at local authorities? 6

What happens to the dogs handled by local authorities? 7

Microchipping 10

Current management of dog-warden services 11

Predominant breed types 11

Conclusions 12



1. Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives

The Dogs Trust Stray Dog Survey (SDS) has been conducted annually since 1997, involving all local authorities (LAs) across the UK. This survey gathers comprehensive data on dog-related services provided by LAs and their interactions with dogs.

The SDS aims to determine several key metrics, including (but not limited to):

- **The estimated number of stray or unwanted dogs handled by UK LAs each year.**
- **The methods by which these dogs come into LA care (e.g., handed in by the public, seized as strays, handed over by the police).**
- **The outcomes for these dogs (e.g., returned to their owners, rehomed, transferred to welfare organizations, put to sleep).**
- **The number of dogs that are microchipped on arrival.**

Dogs Trust uses this information to analyse trends over time and to strategically allocate resources for various initiatives and interventions.

From 1997 to 2019, an external market research company managed the SDS on behalf of Dogs Trust, handling survey distribution, data analysis, and report production. Since 2020, Dogs Trust staff have taken over all aspects of the SDS management internally.



1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Data collection

The 2023/2024 SDS was administered to all LAs via the online survey platform Qualtrics. The survey link was emailed to contacts in each LA on July 1st 2024. If an email bounced back or an automated reply indicated that the mailbox was no longer in use, attempts were made to find a viable contact email on the council website. A follow-up email reminder was sent two weeks later. If an LA did not respond to the email reminder, then a Freedom of Information (FOI) request was submitted to the LA, with the survey questions attached as a Word document. Responses to FOI requests continued to be received until the end of November 2024. Local Authorities were asked to give figures for the period between April 1st 2023 – March 31st 2024.

1.2.2 Analysis

Summary statistics were calculated for the local authorities (LAs) that responded to the survey, and estimates were made for the entire UK. Since not all LAs participated, national totals were extrapolated from the data provided by those that did. Previously, this was done by calculating the average number of dogs handled per responding LA and multiplying it by the total number of LAs in the UK (referred to as the simple average estimate). However, in 2022, we introduced an additional method using multilevel analysis. This approach was advantageous because it utilized all available data from each LA to predict the number of stray dogs for each year, rather than assigning the same figure to all LAs. This allowed for “weighting” LAs based on whether they typically reported higher or lower numbers of dogs (referred to as the weighted estimate). For consistency with previous reports, both the simple average and weighted estimates are presented in this report.

The number of dogs per 10,000 people (DPP) was calculated by dividing the total number of dogs handled by each LA by the human population of that LA, then multiplying by 10,000. Human population figures were obtained from the latest publicly available data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS)¹. Higher DPP numbers indicate more dogs in relation to the human population in each area. This adjusts for inevitable differences in total numbers of dogs between heavily and sparsely populated areas.

Regional comparisons within the UK are primarily made at the country level (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales). For average numbers of dogs handled, the data was further divided using the administrative geographical regions defined by the ONS¹. Consequently, England is the only country broken down into regions, while figures for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are reported at the country level throughout the report.

The SDS previously referred to the total number of dogs handled by local authorities (LAs) as the total number of stray dogs. However, the term “stray” encompasses various meanings, and not all dogs handled by LAs are found straying (i.e., free-roaming and unaccompanied by a human). For instance, some dogs are relinquished directly to the LA by their owners. In this survey report, we use the term “total dogs handled” instead of “strays.” To prevent double counting between different surveys, “total dogs handled” includes only dogs that newly arrived at the LA during the survey period, excluding those already in the LA’s care before this period.



¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/administrativegeography>

2. Summary of findings

2.1 Response Rate

We were able to obtain 2023-2024 data from 225 LAs. This represents around 71% of the 361 LAs in the UK when the survey was administered, with a range from 52% to 100% across regions (Table 1). It should be noted that 3 Northern Ireland LAs did not respond to the survey, but we were able to obtain some of the required data from publicly available records collected by DAERA (The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs of Northern Ireland).

Response rates for the most recent surveys were:

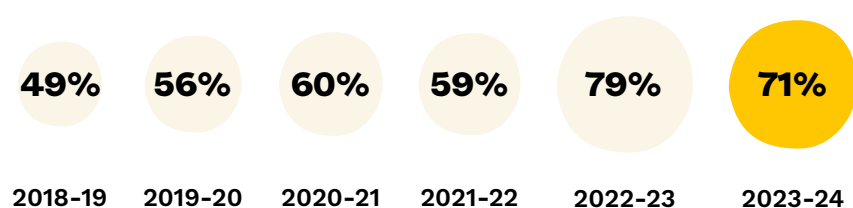


Table 1. Response rate for LAs in different UK regions 2024 (descending order)

Region	Number of LAs that responded to SDS	Total LAs in region	Response rate
NORTHERN IRELAND	11*	11	100%*
North East England	9	12	75%
South West England	19	27	70%
North West England	24	35	69%
Yorkshire and the Humber	10	15	67%
East Midlands	23	35	66%
SCOTLAND	20	32	63%
ENGLAND (all regions)	181	296	61%
WALES	13	22	59%
East England	26	45	58%
South East	36	64	56%
London	18	33	55%
West Midlands	16	30	53%

*NOTE: Three local authorities in NI did not respond to the survey, however, some of their data were able to be added from a publicly available data source (DAERA website)

2.2 Number of dogs handled

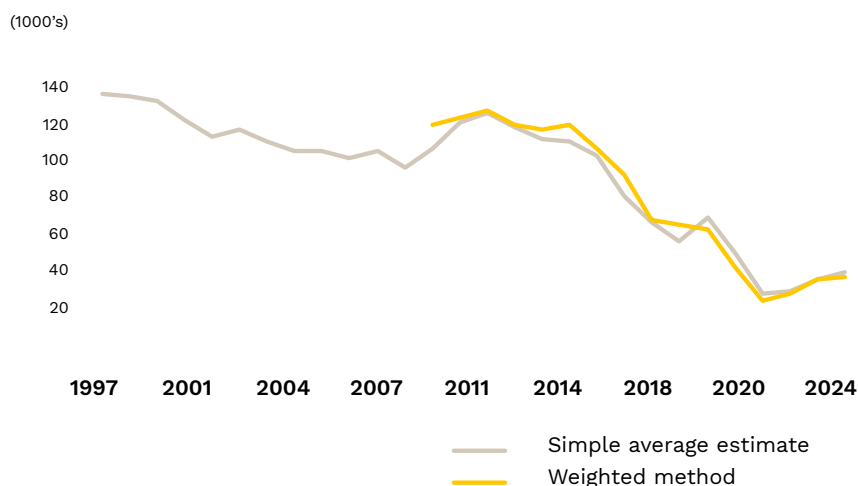
The 225 LAs that provided data reported handling a total of 23,766 new dogs in the period between April 1st 2023- March 31st 2024. There were 211 dogs reportedly already in LA care at the start of this period, therefore LAs handled a total of 23977 dogs altogether. On average each LA handled around 110 new dogs during the period of study. These figures are higher than those recorded last year; in the period between April 1st 2022- March 31st 2023, a total of 27,123 dogs were reportedly handled by the 294 LAs that completed the 2022-23 survey (with an average of 95 dogs per LA).

Based on reported figures from LAs, multi-level analysis provided a weighted estimate of 36,965 dogs handled by LAs across the UK between April 1st 2023- March 31st 2024. There was an increase of 1888 dogs between the 2024 estimate and the 2023 estimate. The simple average estimate was 39,720 dogs. Figure 1 demonstrates the overall decline in the estimated number of dogs handled by LAs since the SDS was first administered in 1997. The grey line represents the estimates made using the method used in previous reports (i.e., the simple average estimate) and the yellow line represents the weighted estimate (please refer to page 3 for a more detailed description of this method). Multi-level analysis could not be conducted for surveys prior to 2009, because we do not have the data for individual LAs before this date (only the nationwide totals).

As can be seen in Figure 1, there has been an overall decline in the number of stray dogs since the survey began in 1997. There was a period between 2008 and 2012 where the numbers started to increase, followed by a steeper period of decline from around 2014 to 2018. There was a brief plateau in numbers around 2018-2019, followed by another steep decline. In the last 3 years, the numbers have started to rise again. We cannot be certain of the causes of these patterns, but some possible explanations are discussed in the conclusion to this report.

Figure 1

**Estimated total
number of dogs
handled by UK
local authorities**
(1997-2024)



There were regional differences in the number of dogs handled (Table 2). As mentioned previously, England is divided by regions but is also shown collectively in Table 2. Figure 2 shows the differences in the average number of dogs handled per LA between the 4 UK countries (top), and the differences in dogs per person (presented as per 10,000 people) (bottom).

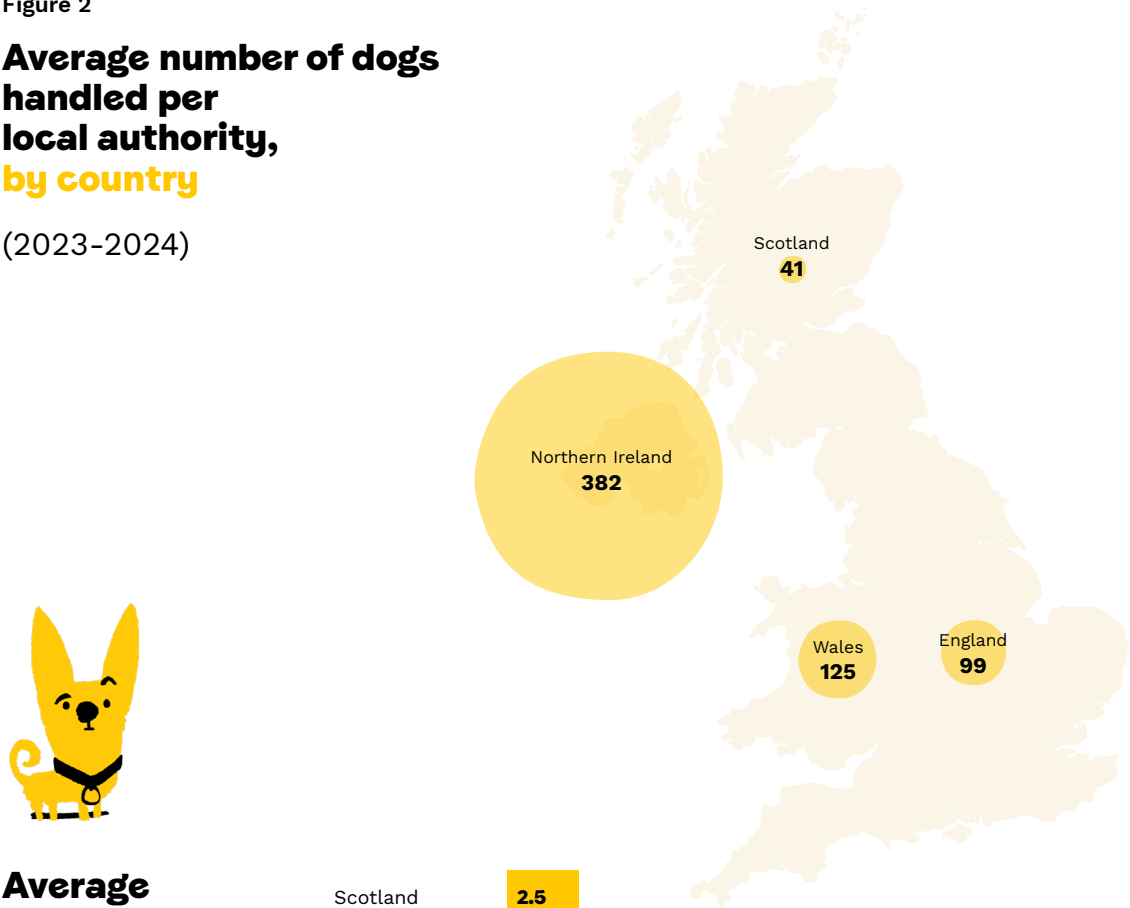
Table 2: Regional breakdown of average total dogs handled and dogs per 10,000 people (DPP) per LA (in descending order of DPP) (2023-2024)

Region	Number of LAs in region (that completed survey)	Average total dogs handled per LA	Average dogs per 10,000 people, per LA
NORTHERN IRELAND	11	382	22.3
WALES	13	125	9.9
North East England	9	206	9.0
West Midlands	16	179	7.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	10	221	6.2
East Midlands	23	73	5.6
East England	26	75	5.3
ENGLAND (all regions)	181	99	5.1
North West England	24	89	4.6
South East England	36	63	4.5
South West England	19	78	3.2
London	18	73	3.1
SCOTLAND	20	41	2.5

Figure 2

Average number of dogs handled per local authority, by country

(2023-2024)



Average dogs per 10,000 people, by country

(2023-2024)



2.3 How do dogs arrive at local authorities?

Dogs come into the care of LAs via different routes. Consistent with previous years, the majority of dogs arrive at LAs after being taken in as strays. In previous surveys, LAs were given the option to record dogs “seized as strays” or “brought in by a member of the public”. However, these categories did not differentiate between members of the public bringing in a dog that they had found straying, and people who were handing over (i.e. relinquishing) their own dog. We believe this is an important distinction, so from the 2022-2023 survey onwards we asked if dogs were taken in as strays or relinquished by their owner, then went on to clarify whether strays were brought in by a member of the public, or found/picked up by LA staff. Table 3 shows the breakdown of ways dogs arrived at LAs using this new distinction. However, for Figure 3 we have merged the strays and relinquished dogs brought in by members of the public so that it is comparable to previous years’ data.

Table 3: How dogs arrived at LAs (2023-2024)

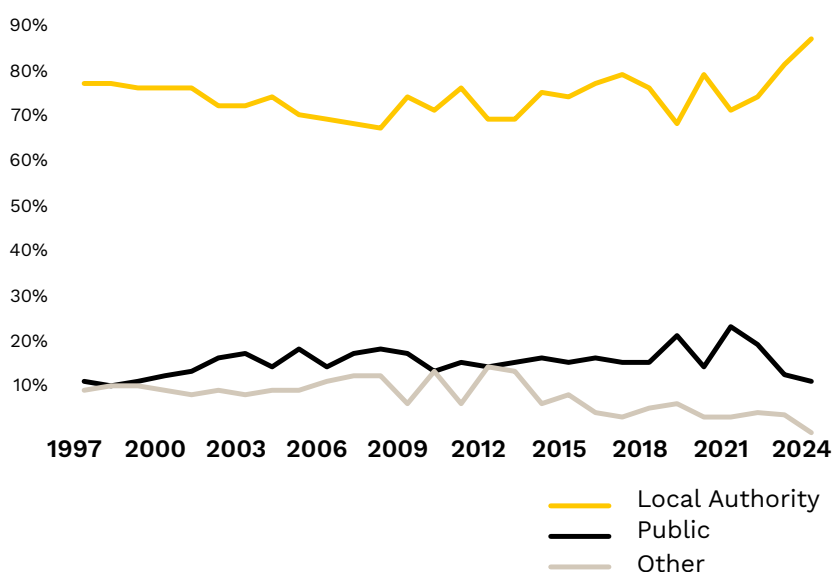
Arrival type	Number	Percentage (inc. all responses)	Percentage (exc. unknown arrival type)
Brought in as stray (includes ‘a’ to ‘e’ below)	17822	75%	93%
a) Brought in by member of the public	984	42%*	10%*
b) Collected by LA staff	7917	44%*	82%*
c) Brought in by police	142	<1%*	1%*
d) Brought in via vet practice	611	3%*	6%*
e) Other/unknown	8168	46%*	NA
Relinquished by owner	1270	5%	7%
Other	90	<1%	<1%
Unknown	4584	19%	NA
Total	23766	100%	100%

* of strays

Figure 3

How dogs were brought to local authorities

% of dogs (1997-2024)



Only 10 councils reported any dogs being seized in response to the Dangerous Dogs Act/Order, with 97 dogs in total reportedly seized in this way (an increase in the total number reported compared to the 2023 survey, where 28 were recorded).

There was some regional variation in the arrival routes of dogs handled by LAs. In England, Scotland and Wales, over 90% of dogs arrived as strays (99%, 92% and 100%, respectively). However, in Northern Ireland only 68% were taken in as strays, and the majority of the remaining 32% were surrendered by their owners to the LA.

2.4 What happens to the dogs handled by local authorities?

In total, approximately 39% of dogs taken in by LAs were reunited with their owners during 2023-24 (either reclaimed during the kennelling period or returned without kennelling). This percentage is lower than that recorded in the 2022-23 survey (43%) and the 2021-22 survey (54%), suggesting a worrying downwards trend over the last few years. Collectively, LAs reported 1478 dogs being put to sleep during the study period (8% of dogs for which outcomes were known). It is estimated that this translates to around 2493 dogs entering the care of LAs being put to sleep across the UK during the study period. There has been an overall reduction in the proportion of dogs being put to sleep by LAs over the years, down from 14% in 2000, 6% in 2010 and 2% in 2020. However, this year has seen a 6% increase compared to 2022-23, with the estimated number of dogs put to sleep across the UK increasing by over 1800.



39%

of dogs taken in by LAs were reunited with their owners during 2023-24 (43% in 2022-23)

Table 4 includes outcomes for all dogs handled during the study period – these include dogs who were in the care of LAs during the study period, but arrived before the study period commenced (pre 1st April 2023). Therefore, the total number is slightly greater than the total taken in during the period. As illustrated in Figure 4, the proportion of dogs being passed on to the welfare organisations has surpassed the proportion reunited with their original owners by the LA for the first time. Table 5 shows each outcome broken down by country; Scotland was the only country in the UK for which the proportion of dogs passed on to welfare organisations did not exceed the proportion reunited with their original owners.

Table 4: Outcomes for dogs handled by LAs (2023-2024)

Outcome	Number	Percentage (inc. all responses)	Percentage (exc. unknown outcomes)
Unknown	4782	20%	NA
Still in Local Authority kennels after 31 st March 2024	346	1%	2%
Reunited with their original owners	7440	31%	39%
Rehomed by the local authority (to new owners)	1722	7%	9%
Passed on to a welfare organisation	8030	33%	42%
Put to sleep	1478	6%	8%
Other outcome	179	1%	1%
Total	23977	100%	100%

Figure 4

What happens to dogs in local authority care?

% of dogs (2020-2024)

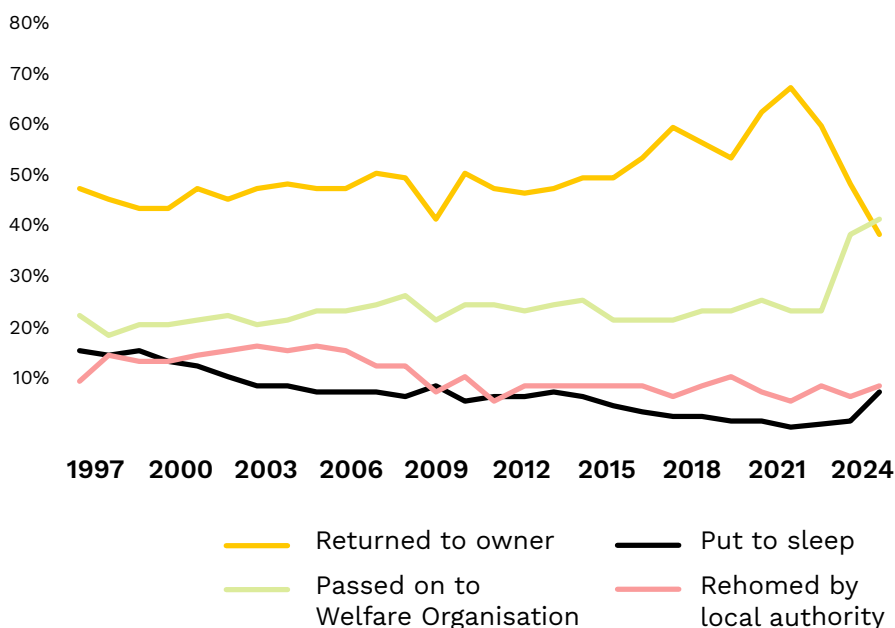


Table 5: Outcomes for dogs handled by LAs broken down by country (2023-2024)

Outcome	England	%
Unknown	2979	17%
Still in Local Authority kennels after 31 st March 2024	203	1%
Reunited with their original owners	5719	33%
Rehomed by the local authority (to new owners)	1051	6%
Passed on to a welfare organisation	6050	35%
Put to sleep	1280	7%
Other	173	1%
TOTAL	17455	

Outcome	Northern Ireland	%
Unknown	1463	35%
Still in Local Authority kennels after 31 st March 2024	20	<1%
Reunited with their original owners	943	22%
Rehomed by the local authority (to new owners)	466	11%
Passed on to a welfare organisation	1167	28%
Put to sleep	151	4%
Other	6	<1%
TOTAL	4216	

Outcome	Scotland	%
Unknown	73	10%
Still in Local Authority kennels after 31 st March 2024	11	1%
Reunited with their original owners	403	54%
Rehomed by the local authority (to new owners)	124	17%
Passed on to a welfare organisation	111	15%
Put to sleep	25	3%
Other	0	0%
TOTAL	747	

Outcome	Wales	%
Unknown	267	17%
Still in Local Authority kennels after 31 st March 2024	112	7%
Reunited with their original owners	375	24%
Rehomed by the local authority (to new owners)	81	5%
Passed on to a welfare organisation	702	45%
Put to sleep	22	1%
Other	0	0%
TOTAL	1559	

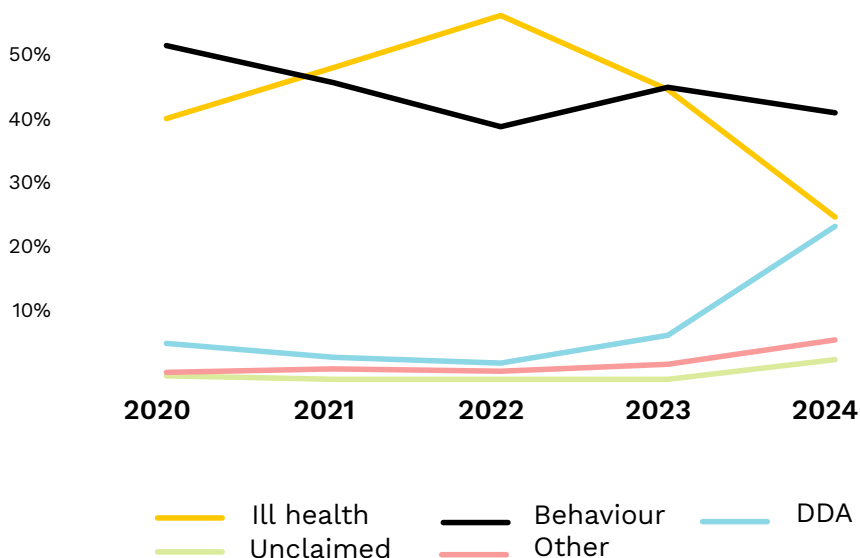


We asked LAs to record reasons for dogs being put to sleep; out of those for which the reason was known (for around 40% of dogs put to sleep the reason was unknown), 225 (25%) were put to sleep due to ill health, 369 (42%) due to behavioural issues, and 212 (24%) due to the Dangerous Dogs Act. In comparison, the figures for these three categories in the 2022-23 survey were 176 (45%), 178 (46%) and 27 (7%) respectively. Figure 5 shows the changes in reasons for dogs being put to sleep from 2020-2024.

Figure 5

Reasons for dogs being put to sleep

% of dogs
(2020-2024)



2.5 Microchipping

Among the LAs that provided information about the microchip status of the dogs they handled, approximately 60% of dogs were already microchipped before being handled by the LA. This is a slight increase compared to the proportion recorded the previous year (52%). Microchipping figures over the past 5 surveys are plotted in Figure 6. It should be noted that microchipping information is not available for all dogs included in the survey, for example, microchipping figures were not reported for 52% of the dogs in the current survey. This year, for the first time, we recorded the numbers of dogs with incorrect chip information. Of the dogs who were recorded as having a microchip on arrival at the LA (and for whom it was known whether their chip had the correct details), only around 38% reportedly had correct owner details on their chip. The remaining dogs either had chips with incorrect owner details (47%), unregistered chips (13%) or the database was not recognised (1%) (Figure 7).

The majority (65%) of the LAs responding to this survey did not offer a microchipping service (Table 6). This is similar to the proportion who reported not offering a microchipping service in the previous survey (67%). Furthermore, in the 2019-2020 survey, 32% of LAs reported that their microchipping service was free for the owner, this has decreased over the last four years; from 14% (2021), 12% (2022), and finally just 9% in 2023 and 2024 (This information is plotted alongside microchipping figures over the past 5 surveys in Figure 6).

Table 6: Responses to “Do you offer a microchipping service?” (2023-2024)

Response	Count	Percentage
No	146	65%
Yes, fully funded (free to the owner)	21	9%
Yes, owner pays the full amount	20	9%
Yes, partially funded (owner pays reduced fee)	19	8%
No Response	19	8%
Total	225	

Figure 6

Microchipping rates and proportion of LAs offering a free microchipping service

(2020-2024)

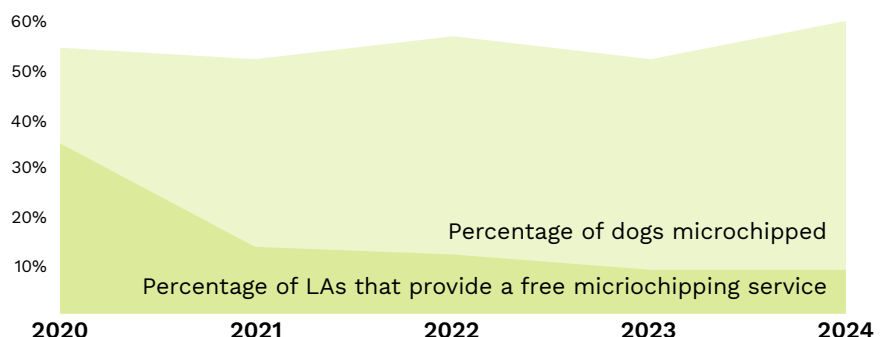
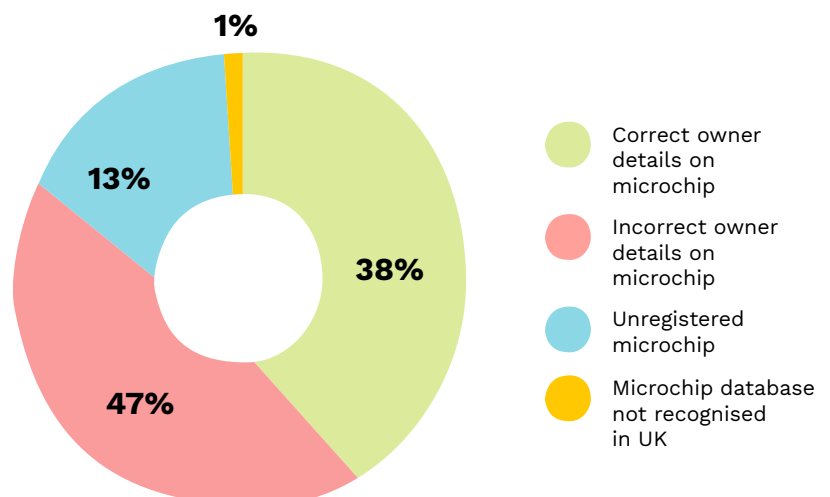


Figure 7

What proportion of microchipped dogs have correct owner details on their chip?

(2024)



2.6 Current management of dog-warden services

This year, 108 LAs (48%) reported that their dog warden was employed directly by them, compared to 71 LAs (32%) who contracted the service out. These proportions are similar to last year (51% directly employed and 28% contracted out). Furthermore, 12% said they had used a combination of directly employed and contracted services, while 4% said there was no dedicated dog warden service in their LA. This year 71% of LAs reported that dogs were handled by private boarding kennels, 8% LAs used a council-owned kennel and 23% used welfare charity kennels to house their dogs (these numbers total to greater than 100% because some LAs used a combination of different kennels).

We also asked how many full-time and part-time staff LAs have dedicated to stray dog services. Only councils whose stray dog service was employed directly (not contracted out) could answer this. Sixty LAs (27%) reported having at least 1 full time member of staff whose role is dedicated entirely to dog-related services. A further 2 LAs said they had at least one part time member of staff whose role is dedicated entirely to dog related services. The remaining 71 LAs (who had staff employed directly) had varying numbers of full and part time staff for whom dog related duties were only part of their role (e.g. environmental officers whose role covers pest control, animal licencing, etc. as well as stray dogs).

2.7 Predominant breed types

Local authorities were asked to report the top 3 breeds that were seized/brought in. Table 7 shows 2 lists: Firstly, the number of LAs that listed each breed as one of their top three (e.g. 101 (45%) of the LAs listed Staffordshire Bull Terriers or their crosses among their top 3 breeds). The second list is the number of LAs who listed each breed as their number 1 most common only (e.g. 51 (23%) of the LAs listed Staffordshire Bull Terriers or their crosses as the number 1 most common breed). The two lists are ordered independently. Many LAs listed “types” rather than specific breeds, for example; “bull breed types” or “terriers”. Staffordshire Bull terriers have been the breed most commonly listed consistently over the last few years, with crossbreeds, Jack Russell terriers and lurchers frequently featuring in the top three.

45%

of the LAs listed
Staffordshire Bull Terriers (SBT)
or their crosses among their
top 3 breeds seized/brought in.



Table 7: Breeds most commonly handled by LAs 2023-2024 (descending order)

Listed in top 3 (1st, 2nd, OR 3rd most common)			First most common only		
Breed	Count	%	Breed	Count	%
Staffordshire bull terrier (or crosses)	101	45%	Staffordshire bull terrier (or crosses)	51	23%
Lurcher	70	31%	Crossbreed (unknown mix)	30	13%
Crossbreed (unknown mix)	65	29%	Lurcher	29	13%
Jack Russell Terrier (or crosses)	56	25%	Crossbreed (bully mix/type)	22	10%
Crossbreed (bully mix/type)	54	24%	Spaniel (springer or cocker)	12	5%
Crossbreed (terrier mix/type)	42	19%	French bulldog	12	5%
Spaniel (springer or cocker)	32	14%	Jack Russell Terrier (or crosses)	11	5%
German Shepherd Dog	18	8%	Border collie	7	3%
Labrador	15	7%	XL bully	6	3%
French bulldog	14	6%	Crossbreed (terrier mix/type)	4	2%

3. Conclusions

The annual Stray Dog Survey indicates that the number of dogs handled by LAs in the UK has generally declined since 1997. This trend continued steadily until a brief increase between 2008-2010, possibly linked to the 2008 financial crisis, which may have led to more pet relinquishments due to financial hardship. A sharper decline from 2015 to 2018 coincides with the 2016 legislation mandating microchipping, likely facilitating the return of dogs to their owners without LA intervention. It's unclear if the decline in dogs handled by LAs is due to fewer strays or reduced capacity to manage them. Financial challenges have forced LAs to cut services, possibly affecting dog-related services. Additionally, increased use of social media to reunite dogs may mean some lost dogs bypass LAs altogether.



38%

of dogs with a microchip
were registered with
the correct owner details

The 2020-21 survey recorded the lowest number of dogs handled since the survey began, with a significant drop from the 2019-20 figures. This period, from April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021, was marked by COVID-19 restrictions, which may have either reduced the number of stray or abandoned dogs or limited LA capacity to collect and house them.

“The 2020-21 survey recorded the lowest number of dogs handled since the survey began, likely due to COVID-19 restrictions—but numbers have risen year-on-year since, coinciding with the ongoing cost of living crisis.”

Since the 2020-2021 survey, the estimated numbers of dog handled have increased year-on-year. The timing of this rise coincides with the cost of living crisis in the UK, which started in 2021 and is still ongoing. Dogs Trust’s “Dogflation” report² revealed that dog owners may be disproportionately affected by the cost of living crisis: with dog-related costs rising even faster than other household expenses. It is likely that these increased pressures may lead owners to consider giving up their dog.

Recent low response rates may make UK-wide estimates less accurate due to a smaller, potentially unrepresentative sample. We used multilevel analysis to predict figures for non-responding LAs based on past data, aiming for more accuracy than the nationwide average. However, some non-responding LAs might have had unusually large or small dog numbers that our model couldn’t predict.

² <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/dogflation>

Regional comparisons between the numbers of dogs handled indicated that LAs in Northern Ireland tended to handle more dogs on average and have a greater number of dogs per 10,000 people compared to LAs elsewhere in the UK. This finding is consistent with previous years, as well as operational experience from Dogs Trusts work in Northern Ireland, suggesting the need for interventions to address the specific causes for higher numbers of dogs entering LA care within Northern Ireland.

“For the first time since the survey’s inception, more dogs were passed on to welfare organisations than reunited with their owners by Local Authorities.”

The methods by which dogs come into the care of LAs has remained reasonably consistent over the years, with the majority being seized directly by LAs as strays. In England, Scotland, and Wales, over 90% of dogs arrived as strays. In contrast, Northern Ireland had a lower proportion of strays (68%), with the remaining 32% surrendered by their owners to the LA. This suggests a difference in how LAs handle stray dogs in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK, which may partly explain the higher numbers of dogs handled.

In recent years there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of dogs reunited with their owners by LAs, peaking in 2021. However, since this peak the numbers have steeply declined again year-on-year. This year, for the first time since the survey’s conception, the proportion of dogs passed on to welfare organisations has exceeded the numbers reunited with their owners by the LA. It is not clear what has caused this sudden decrease; a possible contributing factor could be the financial pressures and resulting cuts faced by LAs leading to reduced capacity to reunite dogs with their owners (which may in turn lead to increased reliance of welfare organisations). The reduction in dogs being reunited with their owners has been mirrored by an increase in dogs being handed over to welfare organisations. Since the LAs are unlikely to know what the outcomes of dogs are after they have been transferred to welfare organisations, it is possible that some of these dogs went on to be reunited with their owners, facilitated by the welfare organisations. However, it is also likely that many went on to be rehomed to new owners.

“In England, Scotland, and Wales, over 90% of dogs arrived as strays.”



Factors influencing how dogs are reunited with their owners has been recorded in the SDS since 1999. However, recently it has become apparent that very few LAs record or have access to this information when completing the survey. For example, in the current survey this information was unknown for 87% of dogs included. This very low response rate led us to take the decision to no longer include these findings in our reporting, as they may not be representative. However, this year, for the first time, we asked LAs to tell us the numbers of microchips they scanned which had incorrect owner details. The majority of microchips scanned by LAs were either unregistered or had incorrect owner details, which would make it more difficult for LAs to reunite dogs with their owners.

Overall, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of dogs put to sleep by LAs since the SDS began, this had remained relatively stable over the last few years. However, this year saw an increase of 6% in the estimated proportion of dog put to sleep compared to the 2023 report. We estimated that this could translate to an increase of over 1800 being put to sleep by LAs across the UK. There was also a shift in the reasons given for put to sleep between this year and last year: In 2023 the proportion of dogs put to sleep due to ill health

and behaviour reasons were very similar (45% and 46%, respectively). However, this year a lower proportion were reportedly put to sleep due to ill health compared to behavioural reasons (25% and 42%). Additionally, the proportion of dogs reportedly put to sleep due to the Dangerous Dogs Act rose from 7% in 2023 to 24% in 2024. Hence, it is likely that this shift is at least in part due to the ban on XL bully-type dogs implemented by the UK government in December 2023. This coupled with the rise in estimated numbers of dogs handled, and the reduction in dogs able to be reunited with their owners, paints a worrying picture for the stray dog situation in the UK. This highlights the need for continued partnership and support for dog-related services within Local Authorities.

“This year a lower proportion of dogs were reportedly put to sleep due to ill health compared to behavioural reasons (25% and 42%).”





A dog is for life®



dogstrust.org.uk



straydogs@dogstrust.org.uk

Dogs Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales (1167663), and in Scotland (SC053144), and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (09365971).

Copyright: Dogs Trust 2025