STRAY DOGS SURVEY 2016

Summary Report
Prepared for Dogs Trust

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background and Methodology

Dogs Trust commissions a survey of local authority dog wardens and environmental health officers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland annually, to investigate what happens to the UK's stray dogs. GfK's Social Research team has been running the Stray Dogs survey since 2003, and was again commissioned to undertake the survey in 2016. Following the standard procedure, the research consisted of two stages: an initial telephone sweep of local authorities was carried out between 8th and 21st April 2016, to update contact details and collect email addresses. For those with email addresses, initial email invitations were sent to all named individuals. If no email address had been supplied, postal questionnaires were sent out to named respondents. These invitations were sent to all 370 local authorities with responsibility for environmental health in Great Britain in the week commencing 19th May 2016.

Two options for completion were made available to respondents to enable them to complete the survey in the most convenient way for them. They could either complete the survey online, or complete a paper version which could be returned to GfK via a freepost envelope, fax or email. Following postal, email and telephone reminders by both GfK and Dogs Trust over a period of ten weeks, 338 questionnaires were returned by the deadline (31st July 2016) (and three after), giving a response rate of 92% across the 370 councils in England, Scotland and Wales (Great Britain). Questionnaires were accepted if at least one question had been answered.

Table 1 shows the response rate broken down by TV region, campaign region and country. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland were contacted separately (directly by Dogs Trust) and their data was later merged with the Great Britain data set. In previous years, The Ulster/Northern Ireland region was referred to as containing 26 local authorities (Northern Ireland was divided into 26 districts prior to 1973, after which it was reformed into 11 'super districts'). In this year's survey, the region is henceforth referred to as comprising of 11 local authorities. As at previous years, all councils in Northern Ireland responded, giving an overall response rate of 92% (352 responding authorities across all 381 in the UK).

Table 1: Response rates

TV Region	Authorities Responding	Total Authorities	Response Rate %
Tyne Tees (North East)	16	16	100%
Granada (North West)	27	35	77%
Yorkshire (Yorkshire)	20	21	95%
Central (Midlands)	59	65	91%
HTV (Wales and West)	26	29	90%
Anglia (East & Anglia)	33	37	89%
Carlton (London)	68	70	97%
Meridian (Southern)	41	43	95%
West Country (South West)	17	17	100%
Border (Borders)	7	7	100%
Grampian (Northern Scotland)	9	9	100%
STV Central (Central Scotland)	18	21	86%
Ulster (Northern Ireland)	11	11	100%
Wales	20	22	91%
West	6	7	86%
Tyne Tees & Border	23	23	100%
GADAL London	31	33	94%
GADAL North East	27	27	100%
GADAL North West	28	37	76%
GADAL Wales	20	22	91%
GADAL Northern Ireland	11	11	100%
England	293	317	92%
Scotland	28	31	90%
Northern Ireland	11	11	91%
Wales	20	22	100%
Total	**352**	**381**	**92%**

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.

As the data is compared and contrasted year on year, the questionnaire retained the key tracking questions to ensure consistency in the time series data. In 2016, some new questions around microchipping were added; specifically around reasons why microchipped dogs were not able to be returned to their owners, whether the LAs offer microchipping services, and whether any microchipping enforcement notices had been served. This final question was added as microchipping became compulsory by law on 6th April 2016.

1.3 Definition of regions

The findings are analysed according to the 13 ITV regions throughout the UK. The definitions are as follows: Tyne Tees (North East), Granada (North West), Yorkshire (Yorkshire), Central (Midlands), HTV (Wales and West), 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).

Since 2009, reference has also been made to the newly formed TV region of Tyne Tees and Border (incorporating Tyne Tees and Border regions), and to Wales and West as two separate regions.

Findings are also analysed by five campaign regions – at previous years these have been: GADAL North East, GADAL North West, GADAL Wales and GADAL Northern Ireland. In 2015, London was added as a new campaign region: it is comprised of thirty-three local authorities and is a subset of the larger Carlton TV region.

1.4 Interpretation of the data

In order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional totals. We report the national total, combined region totals, and individual regional totals. As not all local authorities complete the survey, these totals are calculated by grossing up the figures provided by responding LAs. The grossing process on a regional level takes into account the average results of other responding authorities in that particular region, whereas on a combined or national level it takes into account the average results for all responding LAs. As a result of this, the individual region figures do not always equal the all-UK or combined region totals.

Some of the findings in this report are based on actual numbers reported by each authority; however, at some points reference is made to 'estimated' figures. We have grossed up the reported figures to make approximations for each TV region based on the assumption that the authorities responding are representative of authorities as a whole.

Due to high levels of non-response at some questions it is not viable to provide information in terms of percentages (as we do not know for certain whether a non-response means there is no information available, or that zero dogs would fit into that category) and so in these cases reported numbers are given instead of reported percentages.

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

In 2016, three councils in the Granada TV region responded after the deadline. Their results are included in the report for the key questions only (dogs seized, reunited with owners, passed on to welfare, put to sleep, and microchipped). This late addition of data means that the data tables associated with this report are incorrect for the all-UK, Granada, GADAL North West and England regions.

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.

It is also worth noting that the 11 authorities within Northern Ireland only provide data for a subset of the questions asked. Questions not answered by these authorities are based on a maximum of the 341 responding authorities in Great Britain in 2016.

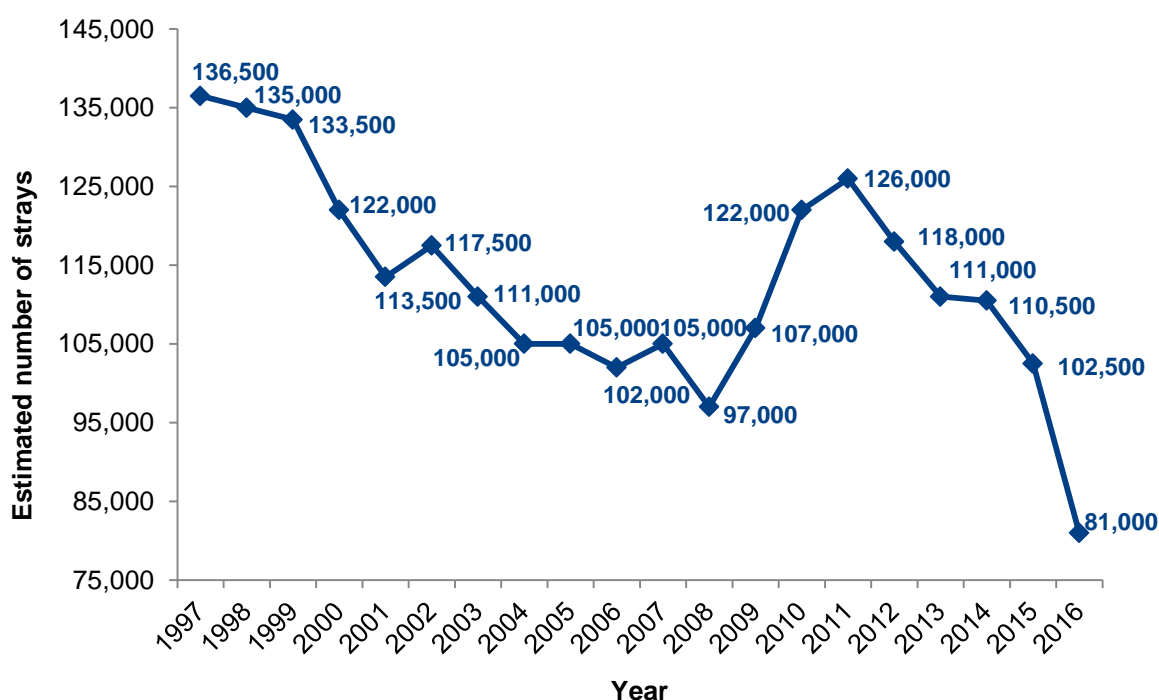Comparisons are made with previous surveys where appropriate in this report.

2 Summary of findings

2.1 The number of stray dogs handled

Based on all 352 authorities who responded to this survey, an estimated 81,050 stray dogs were handled by local councils across the UK between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016. This represents a 21 percentage point decrease from the estimate of 102,516 dogs handled during the same period in 2014 to 2015.

Chart 1 shows the estimated number of stray dogs handled annually across the UK since 1997. The number of stray dogs reported has been declining for the past five years, but it has now reached the lowest point yet seen since the tracking began, with a sharp drop between 2015 and 2016.

Chart 1: Estimated number of stray dogs in the UK since 1997

Base: All local authorities in the UK (381)

Using the latest available census data (recorded in 2011) we are able to estimate the number of people per stray dog across the UK. This year local authorities across the UK handled an average of one stray for every 780 people (which has increased from the one stray per 616 people estimated last year). It is worth noting, however, that there are significant regional variations.

For instance, in the Central STV region local authorities dealt with one stray dog for every 1,789 people on average; whilst in the Tyne Tees region, there is an estimated average of 433 people per stray dog. 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.

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

TV Region	Estimated number of strays 2015-2016	Total authorities in region	Estimated strays per authority	Estimated number of people per stray
Tyne Tees	6,416	16	401	433
Granada	10,254	35	293	684
Yorkshire	7,888	21	376	817
Central	15,038	65	231	609
HTV	8,747	29	302	636
Anglia	4,359	37	118	1,044
Carlton	8,707	70	123	1,372
Meridian	7,718	43	179	786
West Country	2,576	17	152	711
Border	726	7	104	870
Grampian	1,122	9	125	1,239
STV Central	2,225	21	106	1,789
Ulster	5,515	11	501	332
Wales	6,415	22	292	478
Tyne Tees & Border	7,142	23	311	478
UK Total*	81,050	381	213	780

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 and so may not exactly match the combined figures from the Tyne Tees region and Border region. Please see section 1.4 for an explanation of why individual region totals do not always equal combined region/national totals.
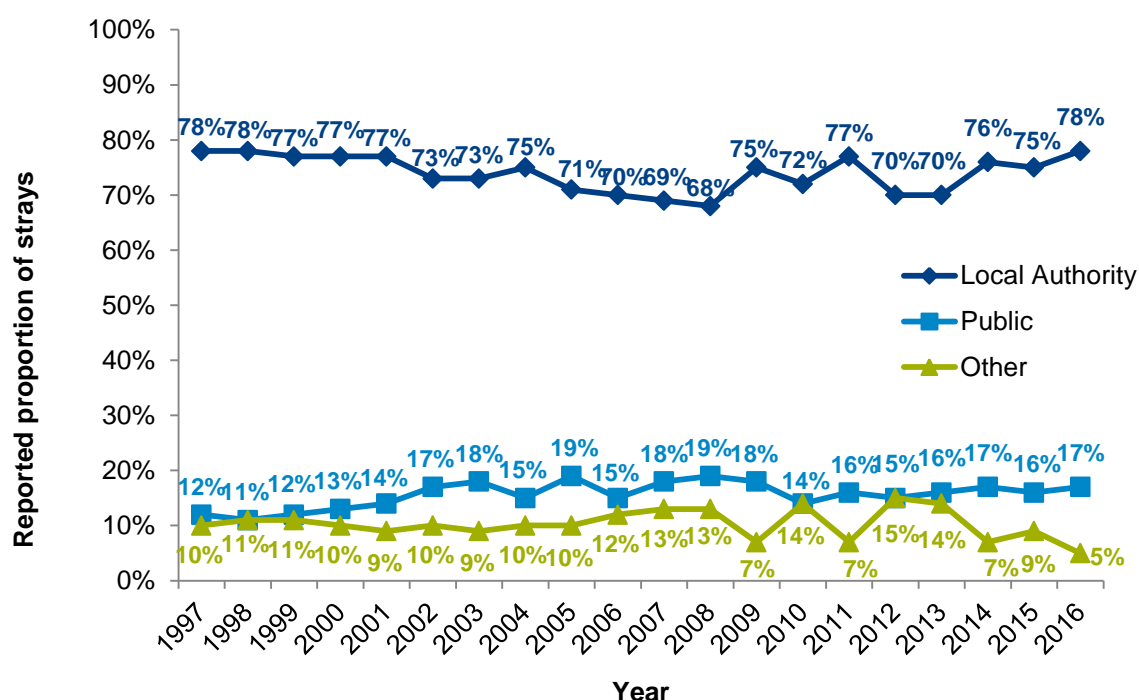
2.2 Seizing stray dogs

The survey first asked local authorities to detail the number of stray dogs that were seized or taken in between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016. 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.

As in previous years, local authorities themselves were responsible for seizing the majority of stray dogs, accounting for 78% of those reported; in line with the 75% identified last year. Seventeen per cent of stray dogs were brought in by the general public, a figure that has remained stable over recent years.

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

Chart 2: How stray dogs were brought to the local authorities

Base: All responding local authorities in the UK (352)

The 'other' figure shown in Chart 2 accounts for a variety of sources including: dogs brought in by the police (1%), brought in under the Dangerous Dogs Act (1%), picked up by other means (3%) and dogs already in local authority kennels on 1st April 2015 (1%). Transfers from vets, the RSPCA, dog wardens, and other agencies each accounted for less than 1% of reported strays.

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 2015 and 31st March 2016.

An estimated 54% of stray dogs were reunited with their owners in this period, either by being reclaimed during the statutory local authority kennelling period (36%) or returned directly to their owner without entering a kennel (18%). These figures have remained stable over time.
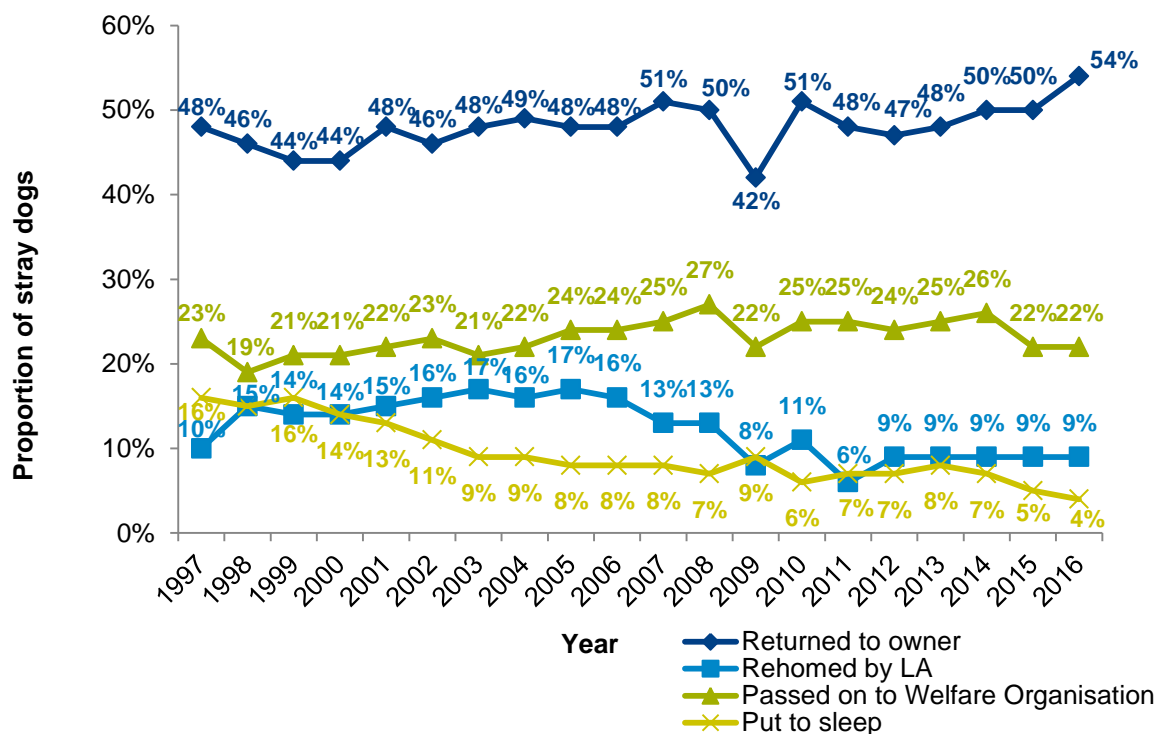
The reported number of stray dogs re-homed by local authorities across the UK has again fallen, this time from 8,465 last year to 6,143 this year. However, this accounts for the same proportion re-homed by local authorities as last year (9%) due to the decrease in the estimated total number of strays. Just under a quarter (22%) of the strays handled were passed on to welfare organisations or dog kennels after the statutory period. This proportion remains the same as last year and is in line with estimates over the last 10 years.

The estimated proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep was 4%, in line with the 5% estimated last year. This year 3,199 stray dogs were reported as having been put to sleep by authorities taking part in this survey (4,880 last year). From this figure we can estimate that approximately 3,463 dogs were put to sleep across the UK during the period of 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. This compares with an estimated 5,142 put to sleep last year.

Amongst the authorities responding, details were given for around half of reported destructions (55%). It was reported that 901 dogs were put to sleep due to behavioural problems or aggression, 538 due to ill health, and 181 under the Dangerous Dogs Act.

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

Chart 3: What happens to stray dogs?

Base: All local authorities in the UK (381)

In addition to these key outcomes, 2% of strays were also reported as still being in the local authority kennels after 31st March 2016. A variety of other outcomes were also mentioned, including strays being kept or retained by finders and dogs being already dead when found or dying in the kennels. Details were not given to account for all stray dogs.

2.4 Micro-chipping

This year dog wardens reported that 16,447 (29%) of the dogs taken in were already microchipped. This compares to 17,789 (20%) of the dogs taken in last year. This figure has been rising rapidly over the last few years: from 5,920 in 2011-2012, to 10,213 in 2012-2013, to 16,443 in the 2013-2014 period[1].

It was reported that of all the seized dogs who had microchips who were unable to be returned to their owners, in 64% of cases this was due to incorrect contact or owner details being registered on the chip, and in a quarter of cases it was due to the dog being unwanted by its owner. For 12% of these dogs, details of reasons had not been recorded.

All the responding local authorities (349) reported a total of 478 microchipping enforcement notices had been served since 6th April 2016 (when it became compulsory for dog owners to chip their dogs by law). Half (51%) were due to the stray dogs being unchipped, and 49% were due to the chip having incorrect details stored.

Of the 292 local authorities that responded to the question on whether they offered a microchipping service, 170 said they offered such a service, with 41% offering it free using Dogs Trust chips, 6% offering it free at a cost to the council, and 20% requiring the owner to pay. Many authorities used a mixture, such as allowing free chipping in some cases but requiring the owner to pay in others.

292 local authorities answered the question (added in 2014) about the numbers of dogs brought in with foreign microchips. Twenty six percent of the responding LAs said the proportion had increased (7% significantly vs 3% last year), whereas seven percent said the number had decreased (2% significantly). A quarter of local authorities (26%) stated that the proportions had stayed the same in the 2015/2016 period. These figures are mostly identical to last year and have been stable since their addition to the survey.
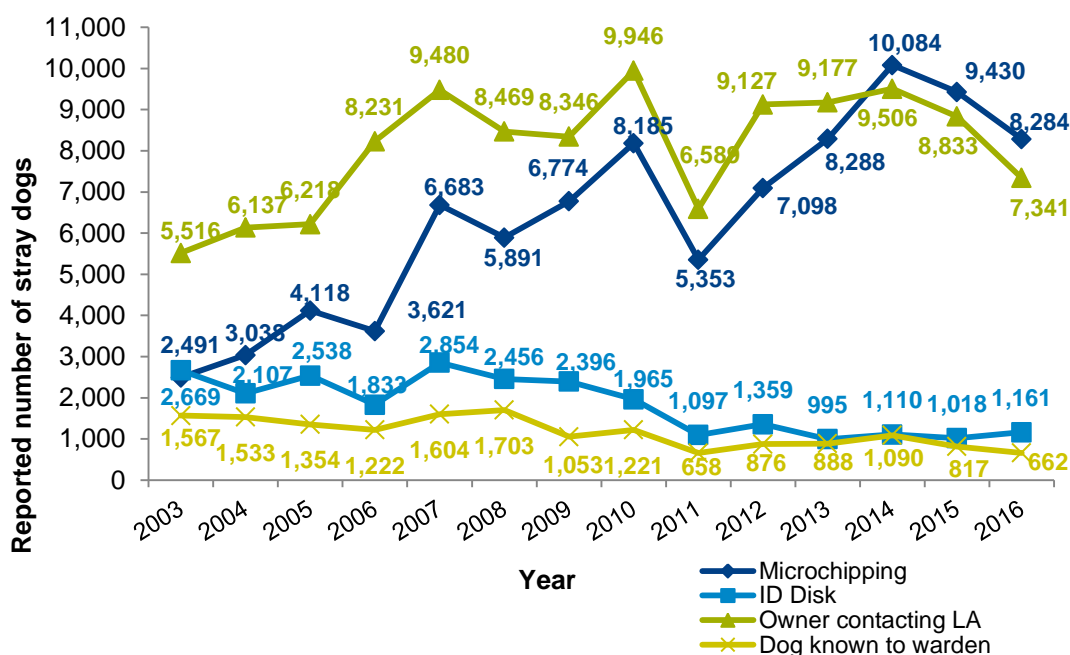
2.5 Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners

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 18,978 strays, which accounts for 48% of all dogs that were reported returned to or reunited with their owners (39,573).

It was reported that 7,341 dogs were reunited due to the owner contacting the local authority or pound directly. Microchips alone accounted for 8,284 reunions (a figure which stabilised somewhat in recent years: see Chart 4), ID disks for 1,161 reunions and the combination of the two for 768 reunions. In addition, it was also reported that 662 dogs were reunited due to already being known to the dog warden. These figures remain largely in line with previous years.

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

Chart 4: Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners

Base: Responding local authorities in Great Britain (349)

Other reasons for dogs being returned to their owners included via other kennels including private and contractors' kennels and local veterinary surgeries. It was also reported that this information was not available or had not been kept for 762 (2%) of dogs, down from 1,380 (3%) and 2,706 (5%) during the two years previous.

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 England, Scotland and Wales. They were asked how their dog warden service is employed, who handles their strays, and the hours in which their dog warden service operates[2]. This group of questions was retained again for the 2016 survey.

Amongst the 308 local authorities answering these questions, 216 (70%) said their dog warden was employed directly by them, compared to 76 authorities (25%) who contracted the service out.

Seventy-two percent (206) of responding authorities said that private boarding kennels handled their strays; whereas 28 (9%) authorities used a council-owned pound and 82 (27%) used welfare charity kennels to house their stray dogs. The remaining 20 authorities said that they used an alternative option for handling their strays.

Amongst the 308 authorities responding, 293 (95%) reported that their dog warden services were operational during working hours Monday to Friday and 101 during working hours on

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[2] 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 LAs answered these questions so the results were not broken down as far as this. For the past two years, over 80% of LAs gave responses here.

Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, 141 (46%) LAs had a dog warden service which worked on-call out of working hours Monday to Friday and 147 authorities operated an on-call service out of hours on weekends, with 50% of all LAs reporting offering an out-of-hours service at any time. These figures are largely comparable with previous years.

2.7 Status dogs

This year's survey again included a number of questions about 'status dogs'. Over recent years, there has been a rise in the number of people owning aggressive dogs for intimidation and dogfighting. These dogs are typically referred to as 'status dogs' and can pose a threat to humans. These dogs tend to be certain breeds – such as Bull breeds (including 'Staffies' and Mastiffs), Rottweilers, Akitas or crosses of these – as their looks and type are thought to convey a certain impression of their owner. Questions about 'status dogs' were not asked of authorities in Northern Ireland, as with previous years.

Across the 349 responding authorities in Great Britain, a reported 14,519 'status dogs' were handled between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016. This accounts for 19% of all strays reportedly handled. A total of 18,535 'status dogs' were reported in the same period last year, making up a comparable proportion of all strays taken in (21%).

Of the 14,519 handled 738 (5%) were put to sleep during this period due to aggressive behaviour. This proportion has been gradually declining over time from a reported 8% in 2013-14, to 6% in 2014-15.

2.8 Conclusions

The number of stray dogs reported by UK authorities overall has decreased by an estimated 21 percentage points since 2015 (following on from an eight percentage point decrease between 2014 and 2015). The grossed number now stands at an estimated 81,050 stray dogs across the UK. Reported figures suggest that the majority (78%) of these dogs were seized directly by the local authority as strays, with a further 17% surrendered by the general public. These figures are in line with previous years.

As seen last year, half (54%) of the estimated stray dogs handled in the UK between 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016 were reunited with their owners, and just under a quarter (22%) were passed on to a welfare organisation or dog kennel for possible rehoming. A further 9% were re-homed by the local authority.

When methods used to return stray dogs to their owners have been identified (for 18,978 dogs), this year it was reported that 8,284 reunions were due to the dog being microchipped. This compares to 9,430 reunions reported last year. The proportion has remained stable over recent years after a rapid increase immediately prior to 2014.

An estimated 4% of strays were put to sleep this year, a slight decrease of one percentage point since last year, representing a further decrease from the 7% estimated in the 2013-14 period.

Response rates for the questions about the local authorities' dog warden services were much higher this year, with 308 LAs in England, Scotland and Wales giving details. Amongst those answering, most (70%) authorities reported that their dog warden was employed directly by them and that they used private boarding kennels to handle their strays (72% of the responding authorities). The majority (293) reported that their dog warden service operated during working hours Monday to Friday, with 101 operating during these hours on the weekend. In addition, 141 said their service operated on-call out of working

hours during the week and 147 offered this service over the weekend. The proportions offering all services, but particularly out of hours services on any day have increased over time.

The number of 'status dogs' handled overall has decreased from 18,535 to 14,519 this year, dropping still further from the 22,350 reported in 2014. This equates to 20% of all strays in 2015, compared with 22% in 2014 (21% in 2015).

There has also been decrease in the number of 'status dogs' destroyed due to aggression, with 738 euthanised this year, compared with 1,023 in 2015 and 1,814 in 2014. However, the proportions have remained fairly stable, with numbers equating to 5% of all strays this year (6% previously).

3   Regional summaries

Table 3: Key estimated figures by TV region

	Total*	Tyne Tees	Granada	Yorkshire	Central	HTV	Anglia	Carlton	Meridian	West Country	Border	Grampian	STV Central	Ulster	Wales	Tyne Tees & Border
Base	352	16	27	20	59	26	33	68	41	17	7	9	18	11	20	23
Response rate (%)	92%	100%	77%	95%	91%	90%	89%	97%	95%	100%	100%	100%	86%	100%	91%	100%
Total strays	81,050	6416	10254	7888	15038	8747	4359	8707	7718	2576	726	1122	2225	5515	6415	7142
Put to sleep	3,463	257	524	638	838	291	122	327	103	41	8	27	25	286	187	265
Reunited with owner	43,646	3536	4808	3758	8371	4430	2664	4837	4293	1937	484	874	1416	2253	3193	4020
Passed on to welfare orgs	17,535	988	2383	1521	3726	2,542	1271	1903	1002	229	232	102	615	1236	1926	1220
People per stray	780	433	684	817	609	636	1044	1372	786	711	870	1239	1789	332	478	478

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.