

**Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions  
Committee****Petition Number:** PE1938**Main Petitioner:** Carlie Power**Subject:** Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- introduce the mandatory microchipping of cats in Scotland; and
- assess the effectiveness of current microchip scanning processes.

**Background**

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce mandatory microchipping for cats and assess the effectiveness of the current microchip scanning process.

Microchips are small identification devices which are approximately the size of a grain of rice. They are implanted into an animal using an injection and have a unique ID number which links an animal to its owner. For a dog or cat, they are usually implanted in between the shoulder blades. The ID number can be found using a microchip scanner. Scanners are used by a number of animal welfare professionals, such as vets and local authority wardens. Pet microchips are not linked to GPS and cannot be used to track the location of the pet.<sup>1</sup> Microchips are mandatory for dogs.

The petitioners suggest that “microchipping offers countless benefits to cats and their owners, especially in terms of reunification if lost, stolen or injured.”

A [2021 report from Cats Protection](#) suggests that 71% of cats in Scotland are microchipped, and 27% of owned cats do not have a microchip.

The petition has been lodged in the Scottish Parliament following commitments by the UK Government to bring forward legislation for England to this effect in 2022. The introduction of compulsory cat microchipping was a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/pet-health-hub/other-veterinary-advice/microchipping-your-pet>

manifesto commitment from the current UK Government who committed to introducing it under its [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#).

The UK Government's consultation on the issue received 33,423; 22,497 of the responses were part of a Cats Protection campaign. The [summary of responses to the consultation states](#) that all responses through the Cats Protection campaign supported introducing compulsory microchipping. Of the remaining 10,926 responses, 187 respondents were opposed to introducing microchipping.

The summary states:

“Many of the respondents in favour of compulsory microchipping, including most sector organisations, supported microchipping on the grounds that it increases the chance of missing animals being reunited with their owner, providing benefits for cat welfare. It also enables a distinction to be made between a feral cat and a suspected stray that has an owner. In relation to stray cats, a microchip can support improved cat welfare by enabling quicker identification of their owner, enabling vets to carry out treatment in discussion with them, if required..

“Some respondents who opposed compulsory microchipping commented that the rationale for introducing compulsory microchipping of dogs was to ensure public safety and prevent nuisance. They considered that these concerns do not apply to cats to the same degree, and compulsory cat microchipping should not be introduced. Other respondents considered that the operation of microchip database systems ought to be improved before compulsory cat microchipping was introduced.”

A number of animal welfare organisations support compulsory microchipping for cats, among them, [Cats Protection](#) and [Blue Cross](#).

Blue Cross highlighted in May 2022 that :

“Almost a quarter of cats admitted to Blue Cross in 2017 were brought in as strays but Blue Cross believes most of them were actually owned pets and hundreds of UK families are now grieving over a beloved missing pet.

[...]

“Blue Cross is calling for microchipping of cats to become compulsory to reduce the number of strays they take in every year. [...]

“Out of all the cats admitted for rehoming with Blue Cross in 2017 a staggering 80 per cent were not microchipped and for those admitted as a stray there was no way the charity could track down their owners and the pet charity had to find them a loving new home.”

The [vet charity, PDSA, has also recommended that cat microchipping be compulsory](#). They suggest, alongside a coalition of animal welfare charities:

“Compulsory cat microchipping, and a centralised database for microchipped dogs and cats and to give guidance to councils to ensure that dogs and cats found dead at the roadside are always scanned for a microchip.”

In Scotland, [the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(SSPCA\) state that:](#)

“Our belief is that microchipping should be mandatory for all dogs and cats.”

However, other organisations took a more cautious view of compulsory microchipping. For example, while the [British Veterinary Association \(BVA\)](#) advocate for the potential benefits, they also stress that there are several factors to address. The organisation notes that:

“Microchipping is a safe, effective, and permanent way to identify individual animals, including cats.”<sup>2</sup>

They highlight a number of benefits, including

- the ability to identify lost, stray, stolen or injured cats, and identify dead cats and be able to notify the owners,
- assisting with record keeping for health test results,
- assisting with tracing and identification in the event of a disease outbreak,
- assisting with enforcement, for example of cat theft, identification and arrest in animal cruelty cases, and reducing fraud at cat shows, and
- the ability to use microchip activated technologies for cat flaps, feeding and watering.

However, while they “recognise the potential welfare benefits of microchipping”, in relation to the UK Government commitment, they stress that “before compulsory microchipping for cats is introduced, the UK Government should:

- “address, and learn from, the issues that are currently preventing the effective implementation of compulsory dog microchipping regulations across the UK. In particular, the current number of separate national databases;

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/cat-microchipping/>

- “ensure that any proposed legislation to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats is clear in its aims, what public or animal welfare issue it is trying to address, and how it will be enforced;
- “ensure that any compulsory microchipping strategy for all owned cats is employed in conjunction with the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners; and
- “recognise that age of microchip implantation should be determined by a veterinary surgeon’s professional judgement, based on the individual kitten’s size, temperament, response to handling, and opportunities to implant alongside other healthcare interventions. Any proposed legislation should therefore specify an age range within which a kitten has to be microchipped (e.g. 8 weeks onwards and no later than 20 weeks), as opposed to an age limit (e.g. kitten must be microchipped by 8 weeks).”

These views are shared by some other veterinary professional organisations. The British Veterinary Nursing Association, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association and the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons and the BVA [responded jointly to DEFRA’s consultation](#) making some similar points.

The petitioners also wish to see official ‘best practice’ guides developed for scanning microchips, and for consideration to be given to whether scanning should be mandatory.

The UK Government’s consultation also addressed scanning. [The consultation asked:](#)

- **Whether vets and other bodies who legally euthanise should be required to scan cats and dogs prior to euthanasia:** While most respondents agreed, some veterinary and animal organisations such as Cats Protection, PDSA and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and other veterinary professional bodies such as the BVA did not support compulsory scanning prior to euthanasia. They highlighted that it is already best practice but, in some instances, could have adverse welfare impacts and should therefore be left to professional judgement.
- **Whether vets should be required to scan cats and dogs upon first presentation:** Similarly, this had broad support. However, veterinary professional bodies supported the principle but opposed making it compulsory. They noted that it is already good practice but that vets should be able to exercise professional judgement to safeguard animal welfare and public safety. There were some concerns from e.g. PDSA and the animal welfare and rehoming charity Blue Cross that a legal obligation could result in the appearance of vets in an ‘enforcer’ role, with negative consequences for relationships with pet owners.

- **Whether local authorities should be required to scan dead cats and dogs brought to them:** This had support from the vast majority of respondents, including among veterinary and animal organisations.

Both positive and negative impacts from compulsory scanning were set out in the summary of responses to the consultation.

The [joint consultation response from some veterinary professional bodies](#) “strongly oppose proposals to introduce blanket or indiscriminate compulsory scanning”, and highlight potential issues with regard to e.g. those fleeing with pets from domestic abuse. They note it is already best practice to scan in a number of circumstances:

- “Prior to microchip implantation – this helps to ensure that there is no other microchip present.
- “On presentation of a lost, stray or apparently unowned animal – this facilitates reunification with the owner when checked against the national databases, providing the owner has kept their details up-to-date.
- “On first presentation at the practice – this ensures that the animal is correctly identified when checked against the national databases and serves as a useful reminder to the new client to ensure that they keep their details up-to-date. The microchip details should be recorded on the practice database – often lost pets are local to the practice and a check against the practice’s own database can provide a quick solution.
- “Before travelling abroad – this is to ensure that the microchip is still working and has not migrated significantly and would not normally include a check against the national database(s).
- “Before rabies vaccination or official certification – vets are obliged to scan for a microchip before administering a rabies vaccination and issuing a pet passport, or before completing other official documentation that requires identification of the animal (eg official health screening tests)
- “Annually as routine (eg at the time of the annual check-up and/or booster vaccination) – this is also to ensure that the microchip is still working and has not migrated significantly. Although it would not normally include a check against the national databases it should include a check against practice records and provides an opportunity to remind the owner to keep their details up-to-date.
- “On admission for treatment or hospitalisation where appropriate – this is part of good clinical practice to ensure that the patient is matched to clinical records. This would not normally include a check against the national database(s).

- “Prior to euthanasia if considered appropriate – this is part of good clinical practice to ensure that the patient is matched to clinical records. This would not normally include a check against the national database(s) and in many cases may not be appropriate.
- “On presentation of wildlife – this is to identify any wild animals part of a local or national, wildlife rehabilitation or research programme.”

The [UK Government announced in December 2021 that new legislation would be brought forward](#) which would make it compulsory to microchip cats. The UK Government noted that:

- 99% of people support compulsory microchipping for cats according to recent Government consultation.
- Owners will be required to microchip their cats by the time they reach 20 weeks of age
- Microchipping cats will help reunite thousands of lost or stray pets every year

The [UK Government has recently concluded a second consultation on the legislative changes](#). The consultation page notes that the

“proposed changes aim to improve the operation of the microchipping database system, making it easier to identify pet keepers and to reunite pets with their keepers. This will mean reduced costs to local authorities, vets and animal shelters, as well as benefiting animal welfare and deterring pet theft”.

## **Scottish Parliament action**

**Motion ref. S6M-02859**

### **Mr Smokey and Microchipping Scotland's Cats**

Submitted by: Christine Grahame, Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale, Scottish National Party.

Date lodged: Friday, January 21, 2022

Supported by: Karen Adam, Miles Briggs, Alexander Burnett, Stephanie Callaghan, Donald Cameron, Finlay Carson, Maggie Chapman, Sharon Dowey, Jackie Dunbar, Annabelle Ewing, Kenneth Gibson, Pam Gosal, Jamie Greene, Bill Kidd, Monica Lennon, Fulton MacGregor, Ruth Maguire, Gillian Martin, Stuart McMillan, Marie McNair, Audrey Nicoll, Colin Smyth, Paul Sweeney, Evelyn Tweed, Mercedes Villalba, Sue Webber, Elena Whitham

That the Parliament notes reports that the UK Government has committed to introducing compulsory cat microchipping for owned cats in England; understands that this follows a UK Government call for evidence and

consultation, in which 99% of respondents from across the UK supported the measure; further understands from Cats Protection's Cats and Their Stats Scotland Report 2021 that 27% of pet cats in Scotland are not microchipped; commends Cats Protection and other welfare organisations that offer support to the public to get their cats microchipped; recognises that many cats roam freely; considers that a microchip increases the chances of a lost or injured cat being safely reunited with its owner and that microchipping is part of responsible cat ownership, and believes that all cats across Scotland would benefit from microchipping, like Christine Grahame's own cat, Mr Smokey.

**Question ref. S6W-03475**

**Asked by: Maurice Golden, North East Scotland, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party**

**Date lodged: 4 October 2021**

**Question:**

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to findings from the charity, Cats Protection, which suggests that 29% of owned cats in Scotland are not microchipped, and what measures it is taking to encourage owners to microchip their cats to help reunite lost animals and identify those that have been stolen.

**Current status: Answered by Mairi Gougeon on 12 October 2021**

**Answer:**

The Scottish Government Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats recommends that all cat owners should consider neutering and microchipping their pets as the best way of being reunited with them should they be separated.

The findings of the Cats Protection's survey suggest that the owners of around 71% of cats have accepted that recommendation and voluntarily microchipped their pets.

The Scottish Government does not currently consider that microchipping should be made compulsory for cats but is aware of the Defra call for evidence and recent public consultation on the microchipping of cats. We will give full consideration to the results of this consultation when they are available.

## **Scottish Government action**

In its 2021-22 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to reviewing animal welfare legislation by 2025. However, no issues in relation to microchipping were specified.

Since 2016, microchipping dogs has been compulsory under the Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016. [The Scottish Government stated in 2016 that:](#)

“Microchipping of cats and other pets will continue to be voluntary, however, we encourage pet keepers to consider microchipping their animals where possible and potentially useful. We have long recommended microchipping as best practice in the identification of dogs and cats, including in our [Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs](#) and [Code of Practice for the welfare of cats](#).”

In addition, [the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission states in its July 2021 workplan](#) amongst “potential areas” of work in the medium term to:

“Consider welfare aspects of microchipping domestic cats, compulsory neutering of cats and outdoor cat controls – opportunity for SAWC to review policy or provide an opinion on welfare issues at some point.”

The [Scottish Animal Welfare Commission is an expert commission](#) whose role is to provide advice to the Scottish Government.

**Anna Brand, Senior Researcher**

**SPICe Research**

20/06/2022

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