

Introduce the mandatory microchipping of cats in Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 27 Mehefin 2022
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Petition Number: P-06-1283

Petition title: Introduce the mandatory microchipping of cats in Wales

Text of petition: Microchipping is part of responsible pet ownership and has countless benefits for both cat and owner. If a persons cat becomes lost, stolen or gets injured, a microchip is the best chance for reunification. Microchips are not just beneficial for the cat and owners who love them, but also eases strain on the organisations who have to handle and treat unidentifiable cats.

Cats Protection estimates more than a fifth of cats are not microchipped in Wales, regardless of relentless campaigning.

We were involved in the UK Bill which ultimately led to the upcoming 2022 England regulations, and continue to work with DEFRA on this as stakeholders yet, due to animal welfare being a devolved issue, unfortunately this will not apply to Wales. The UK Government have now published their response and results of the public consultations, and we would like to see this extended to Wales to help benefit the cats and owners.

Also, a previous successful Senedd petition (P-05-779) of ours saw Wales become the first all scanning nation in the world as all Welsh local authorities opted to scan cats collected. However, this was voluntary action which, since 2017, has since slipped in some areas. We would appreciate the issue of scanning to be re-looked at my the committee.



1. Background

Cats Protection estimates there are over 600,000 cats in Wales, and 24% of those are not microchipped - similar to the UK average of 26%.

In October 2019, the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) launched a Call for Evidence on the mandatory microchipping of cats in England. Of the 3,140 responses, 99% supported mandatory microchipping of cats.

The respondents who supported mandatory microchipping stated the following advantages:

- Increased chance of successful reunification of pet and owner if the cat gets lost or stolen;
- Peace of mind for the owner and closure for owners whose cats are found injured/dead;
- Quicker reunification means less time spent by rehoming centres trying to trace keepers; and
- Enables a distinction to be made between a feral cat and a suspected stray that has an owner.

Respondents opposed to mandatory microchipping cited the following disadvantages:

- Elderly or people with disabilities may be disadvantaged in terms of accessing information about compulsory microchipping of cats;
- Local authorities do not have the resources to enforce requirements;
- The rationale for microchipping dogs was to ensure public safety and prevent nuisance, this does not apply to cats to the same degree; and
- Operation of microchip database systems should be improved before compulsory microchipping is introduced.

In December 2021, DEFRA announced the UK Government will introduce mandatory microchipping of cats in England as part of its Action Plan for Animal Welfare. The UK Environment Secretary says the new policy will be monitored by vets and enforced in the same way as the requirement for microchipping of dogs.

In most cases, the Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015 requires owners to microchip their dogs if they are older than eight weeks. In the year following the regulations, the percentage of dogs microchipped in Wales rose from 69% to 94%.

RSPCA Cymru says:

Compulsory microchipping is a further example of where legislation between cats and dogs currently differs in Wales. While the compulsory microchipping of dogs has been in force in Wales since 2015, there are no firm commitments relevant to cat microchipping in place as of yet.

The cost of microchipping a cat is between £20 and £30. Local rescue centres, cat organisations and charities may encourage pet owners to microchip their pets by offering the service for free or at a reduced rate.

2. Welsh Government action

In November 2021, the Welsh Government published its Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26. The plan includes a commitment to consider mandatory microchipping of cats. The Welsh Government commissioned research to investigate the effectiveness of existing dog microchipping regulations in partnership with the UK and Scottish Governments. The report will outline any potential benefits of extending the regulations to include cats.

The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats, first published in 2008, explains what owners must do to meet the standards of care set out in the Animal Welfare Act 2006. In 2018, the Welsh Government launched a consultation to consider whether the Code of Practice needed to be updated. The consultation expressly asked for comments and advice on microchipping.

Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales (CAWGW) supported the strong recommendation from the Welsh Government for cat owners to microchip their cats but believes legislation is required. The group highlighted that many charities operate schemes across Wales to help with the cost of microchipping, especially for those on low incomes.

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home urged caution on legislating for mandatory microchipping of cats. The charity said that although microchipping dogs is a legal requirement in Wales, there have been “significant issues with the implementation”. These issues must be understood before mandatory microchipping of cats can be effectively introduced.

A 2019 Review of the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 by the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework group found compliance with microchipping legislation is poor. One of their

recommendations to increase compliance is for a single integrated database of microchip registrations to be created, accessible to police and local authorities, and implemented at either a country or UK level. In response to this recommendation, the Welsh Government said, “There are no immediate plans to propose amendments to the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014”.

The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats was updated in 2019. The Code of Practice does not expressly advise the microchipping of cats. Instead, it informs owners that microchipping is “the preferred method of identification” as this will “speed [the cats] return to you”.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The issue of mandatory microchipping of cats has been raised several times in Plenary during the Sixth Senedd.

In answer to a written question in March regarding extending mandatory microchipping to cats the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd, Lesley Griffiths, (‘the Minister’) said:

Our Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW) includes a commitment to consider extending compulsory microchipping to include kittens and cats in Wales. Proposals in this area will draw upon research published in 2021 which was joint-funded with other GB administrations. Following completion of our analysis of the research, we will consider whether any amendments are required on the current microchipping regulations for dogs and possible new measures for kittens and cats. Any proposed changes would be subject to a full public consultation process.

We cannot commit to a specific timeline at this point but the AWPW covers the period from 2021-26.

In response to a written question in March regarding ensuring all dog and cat microchipping databases will be accessible through a single point of entry, the Minster said:

There have been two recent research reports published – about microchipping and responsible dog ownership. Additionally, a policy paper about pet theft, published by Defra, the Home Office and the

Ministry of Justice was published in 2021. All of these make reference to microchipping, database ownership and ease of access.

The Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer is working with colleagues in other administrations to ensure any future changes to the collection and use of microchipping data meets the needs of the public and the enforcement agents alike.

We will continue to work with Defra to consider future changes in relation to microchipping databases for both cats and dogs. These discussions will include matters around accessibility and a single point of entry.

The Minister reiterated the answers to the two written questions in her response to this petition.

The [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee held](#) an evidence session on animal welfare in November 2021 during which regulating cat breeding was discussed with animal welfare organisations. CAWGW welcomed the progress on introducing mandatory microchipping of cats in Wales.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.