

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE2145: Bring in compulsory microchipping for cats in Scotland

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make it compulsory for cats and kittens to be microchipped in Scotland.

Existing legislation

Cats are protected animals under the [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#), under which anyone who is responsible for an animal has a legal duty to take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare. Section 37 of the [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) permitted Scottish Ministers to make codes of practice for protected animals. [The code of practice for the welfare of cats](#) was published in 2009.

The [code](#) covers all domesticated cats for which a person is responsible. It covers many aspects of caring for a cat's welfare including the need for a suitable environment, diet and to be protected from suffering, injury and disease. As well as the need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals.

Although the code does not have legislative effect, it is intended to promote and give examples of good practice. Failure to comply with a provision of this Code, whilst not an offence in itself, may be relied upon as tending to establish liability where a person has been accused of an offence under Part 2 of the 2006 Act which covers animal welfare.

Microchipping

The [code](#) includes a section on identification, stating that 'your cat should be identified.' It states that there are two methods which can be used in combination to help trace to their owner should they become lost. These are microchipping and wearing a collar that has the cat owner's contact details.

The code states: "microchipping – this is the preferred method of identification. A microchip is a tiny computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice, that contains a unique identification number. It is injected under the skin of a pet by a vet or trained pet care specialist and the owner's details are kept on a database. This will help you to be re-united if your cat is lost."

The [Microchipping of Dogs \(Scotland\) Regulations 2016](#) means that dogs over eight

weeks old in Scotland must be microchipped. This includes dogs being implanted with a microchip and having their details registered on a compliant database. The current keeper is the person responsible for ensuring that a dog is microchipped. Failure to comply with the regulations are punishable by a fine not exceeding level 2 on the standard scale, currently £500.

A 2024 [report conducted by Cats Protection](#) found that there were 840,000 owned cats in Scotland, 72% of which had been microchipped. This was slightly less than the UK as a whole at 75%.

The report referenced legislation introduced in March 2023 requiring all pet cats, in England, that are over the age of 20 weeks old to be microchipped by the 10th of June 2024. This decision was supported by a [2020-2021 DEFRA consultation](#) which found that 99% of respondents agreed that cat microchipping should be compulsory in England.

The 2024 Cats Protection report notes that microchipping numbers for dogs rose from 75% to 92% in the first four years following similar legislative changes. Microchipping cats has also become mandatory in [France, Belgium, Greece, Japan and some parts of Australia and Spain.](#)

The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission's (SAWC) [report on responsible ownership and care of domestic cats](#) recommended that Scottish Ministers should introduce legislation to require the compulsory microchipping and registration of owned cats in Scotland.

They further recommend the development of a centralised database to simplify the process of registration. As well as a programme of public education to encourage further uptake of voluntary microchipping and registration, prior to the introduction of legislation.

They advocated against doing nothing because while 70% of owners voluntarily microchip and register their cats, there is no real evidence that the level of microchipping is increasing.

Benefits of microchipping

The [Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(Scottish SPCA\)](#) have [identified](#) that the main benefits of microchipping include a permanent form of identification. Consequently, if a pet is lost, stolen or injured a microchip can significantly increase the likelihood of the owner and pet being reunited. Animal rescue centres, veterinary clinics and animal control agencies routinely scan lost pets for microchips.

In turn, a microchipped animal may spend less times in shelters. Deceased cats can also be identified more quickly, giving an owner closure.

In cases of dispute a microchip can help an owner prove that a pet is registered to them through the contact information linked to the animal. Stolen pets with microchips can be traced back to their registered keeper. Therefore, if there are high

levels of microchipping in an animal population it can act as a disincentive to theft.

Microchipping also reduces the chances of deliberate pet abandonment as owners can be traced. This can save resources as cats without microchips can more easily be assumed to be feral and therefore treated accordingly.

The [SAWC report](#) highlighted that there is little evidence of any significant welfare disbenefits and the experience of other countries, where there have been moves to require compulsory microchipping, does not suggest that this is problematic for animal welfare. Implanting a microchip at an early age, for example by 12-20 weeks of age in different jurisdictions, but ideally before the first transfer of ownership from the breeder/shelter to the new owner, would ensure that this becomes a routine part of acquiring a cat for new owners.

Barriers to microchipping

Barriers to microchipping include the need for well-run databases, such as a central database to house both owner and microchip information. As well as owners needing to ensure their information is regularly updated on the microchip databases.

While there would be a cost to owners for the process of implanting a microchip, it is small. The animal welfare charity [Blue Cross have reported](#) that depending on where someone lives in the UK the cost of microchipping a cat is £15-25 as well as a small fee when changing a pet's details on the database.

The [CATS report](#) found that, in 2024, of cats microchipped in Scotland 91% had up to date details.

Previous parliamentary engagement

Past discussions of mandatory chipping include: [PE1938](#) (2022) - Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland.

When discussing the petition on the 8th March 2023, the Convener of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee stated "The Scottish Government has stated that it does not consider that microchipping or the scanning of microchips should be made compulsory for cats at this time. The recent submission raises concerns shared with UK counterparts that it could create an enforcement role for veterinary surgeons or result in pet owners avoiding taking their cat to receive medical attention if the animal is stolen or unchipped."

The petition [was then closed under 15.7 of the Standing Orders](#) on the basis that the petitioner is satisfied that the Scottish Government's current approach will adequately address the issue of mandatory microchipping of Scotland's cats.

Euan Ross, Senior Researcher, SPICe

26/03/2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of

petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP