

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday 8
March 2023

PE1938: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

Lodged on	20 June 2022
Petitioner	Carlie Power
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• introduce the mandatory microchipping of cats in Scotland; and• assess the effectiveness of current microchip scanning processes.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1938

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [29 June 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to the Scottish Government and to the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the Scottish Government, the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission, the petitioner, Christine Grahame MSP and Jillian Brown which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's [webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the petition's [webpage](#).

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1938: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

Petitioner

Carlie Power

Date lodged

20/06/2022

Petition summary

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.

Previous action

We have worked with Christine Grahame MSP, who attempted to raise the question previously to Parliament but it eventually got dropped without being heard. We have also spoken with Perthshire MP John Nicolson. We did create a petition previously (PE01736) for reportable road accidents alongside compulsory microchipping. It was not taken forward at that time. However, since 2019 when that was created, there has been significant changes in other parts of the UK which the Scottish Government could use as a benchmark.

Background information

England is now set to bring this law forward in 2022 and we would like to see this extended to Scotland. Microchipping offers countless benefits to cats and their owners, especially in terms of reunification if lost, stolen or injured. The UK Government have released their response and consultation results, which saw a 99% approval rate from the public. In 2018, we worked on a Bill which ultimately led to the current upcoming England regulations, and we continue to work with DEFRA as stakeholders on the issue of microchipping and the scanning of microchips.

In terms of the scanning of microchips, we would like to see official 'best practice' guides explored, as well as consideration for mandatory scanning.

Cat Protection figures reveal that 42% of cats in Scotland (290,000 cats) are not microchipped. The UK average was 32%.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1938 on 29th June 2022

The Convener: That brings us to our final petition this morning, which is PE1938. It has been lodged by Carlie Power and calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce mandatory microchipping of cats in Scotland and to assess the effectiveness of current microchip scanning processes. We are joined by the Parliament's most famous cat owner, Christine Grahame MSP. Welcome.

The Scottish Government has indicated that it is working alongside the other UK Administrations on animal welfare issues, including consideration of the microchipping of cats. It advises that officials are following Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs proposals in the area and will give full consideration to the recent consultation results and any proposed legislation.

The petitioner welcomes the Scottish Government's response and states that she is satisfied that the current approach will adequately address the issue of mandatory microchipping. She raises the issue of mandatory scanning and highlights that standards have been falling below best practice. The petitioner cites, as a potential reason for falling standards, a lack of understanding of and training in the use of scanning equipment, and she says that no official guidance on the issue is in place for councils.

The SPICe briefing that we have received highlights the UK Government's consultation, which addressed scanning. Generally, it found broad support for improvements to the process but raised positive and negative impacts that might arise from compulsory microchipping. I think that it is quite likely that the Scottish Government will, having indicated that it is looking closely at the consultation in relation to microchipping and scanning, be inclined to follow whatever final course the UK Government chooses on this issue.

Christine Grahame, is there anything that you would like to say in relation to the petition?

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Yes. I would like to add a bit, because there is a distinction to be made from dogs being microchipped, which happens for a variety of reasons—it is compulsory and makes it easier to impose dog control notices and so on. Cats are a different kettle of fish. I do not know why I mention fish with cats, but there we are. The issues are welfare of cats and responsible ownership.

If I can, I will briefly tell you a very short story, convener. Many years ago, my son went out in the garden and found a cat in the pouring rain under the bushes. We had two cats of our own at the time, and we brought it in. We kept it safe overnight, but it was obvious that the cat was very ill. We took it to the vet, who said that it was a very old cat and that it had kidney failure and was dying. My son and I burst into tears, so

the vet asked, “How long have you known the cat?” We said, “Twenty-four hours.” It did not matter.

The point of the story is that the owner would never have known what happened. Cats often disappear to die. My own cat did that; it went down into the garden and I found it later. They go away from the house.

From the point of view of an owner, if a cat is injured, killed on the road or just disappears to die quietly away from its normal place, which is natural for a cat, it is very upsetting for the cat owner to never know what happened.

It is the same when cats adopt another household, which has been known to happen. They just wander off and decide, “The food’s better here; I think I’ll stay.” Again, if they were microchipped, at least the owner would know where they had gone.

I am not obsessed with cats—let me make that plain—but I think that the issue is terribly important. I commend the various cat charities. If you get a rescue cat like Mr Smokey—who is very famous, of course—the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals charges you to have the cat neutered, which they usually are not, and to have the cat microchipped. It is a welfare issue and it is about responsible ownership.

From the Government’s response, I see that the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission says in its July 2021 work plan that

“potential areas of work in the medium term” are “to consider welfare aspects of microchipping domestic cats, compulsory neutering of cats and outdoor cat controls”

and so on. It seems to me that that is a light touch in respect of potential areas to consider. I ask the committee to consider writing to the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission to see whether it proposes anything more solid. I appreciate the other matters that the convener raised, about scanning and so on.

As I understand it, there should be no cost to the public purse. If an animal is taken to the vets and it is not known whose it is, it could be scanned and the owner found. The main thing would be that owners would have to bring details for the microchip up to date if they were to move.

Finally, if you have a cat flap—I am not advertising any manufactured devices—that identifies microchips, your cat can get in and out of the house and no other cats can come in. Mr Smokey has that protection from any invaders: only he can get in and out using the cat flap, and I am sure that he is very happy with that.

There is a range of things that I would like to see being made compulsory. Every time you talk about cats, people smile at you, but many of us love the wee devils. Thank you.

The Convener

I am grateful to you for that, Christine. We have taken note of one or two areas that we might pursue. I am wondering what the consequences would be for us all if we could relocate to a house or street where the food was better. It might provoke a few controversies. [Laughter.]

Christine Grahame

Convener, I think that I will be in touch with Mrs Carlaw on that one.

The Convener

Mr Carlaw does all the cooking, so there might be a disastrous outcome. [Laughter.]

I am grateful for what Christine Grahame has said. Are there any suggestions from colleagues in addition to the one that we have heard from Christine Grahame?

David Torrance

I adopted a cat 11 years ago—or I should say that a cat adopted me. I should never have fed it tuna and chicken. I must confess to pinching somebody's cat a long time ago.

I would also like to write to the Scottish Government, seeking its view on the additional evidence that has been provided by the petitioner and SPICe regarding cat microchips and compulsory scanning, if that is acceptable to the committee.

The Convener

Is that acceptable?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener

Fergus, are you nodding your head in agreement? Yes—I think you are. In that case, that is what we will do. We will keep the petition open.

Christine Grahame

Could the committee get in touch with the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission to see whether it has a more specific timetable? What is in your briefing suggests that it is rather casual in what it is saying just now.

The Convener

We will do that as well. Thank you very much.

Annexe C

Scottish Animal Welfare Commission submission of 19 July 2022

PE1938/D: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

In its consideration of the Petition to introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland (**PETITION PE1938: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland**) on 29th June the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission for its views on this issue. The letter was received on 7th July 2022. The CPPP Committee specifically asked whether SAWC:

- has any specific plans to bring forward consideration of compulsory microchipping in cats; and
- if so, what the timescales for this work might be

SAWC is aware of the UK Government's plans to require microchipping of pet cats in England. It is also aware of the ongoing UK Government review of the wider microchipping rules in England. SAWC understands that the Scottish Government will give full consideration to the findings of the UK Government's review in due course.

SAWC is an independent body that provides advice to Ministers. It takes an egalitarian approach to prioritising its work, based on severity of welfare issues affecting all sentient animals in Scotland. The welfare aspects of microchipping domestic cats in the context of continuing conservation initiatives for the wildcat in Scotland were identified by SAWC and have featured in SAWC's most recent [work plan](#) as an issue to potentially focus on in the medium term. There are many other animal welfare issues that are also very relevant to Scotland which SAWC has been analysing, and as such, it has not yet had an opportunity to investigate and focus on the issue of microchipping in cats.

I hope that these comments are of interest and we will be pleased to provide more detailed views from SAWC if required.

Scottish Government submission of 26 July 2022

PE1938/E: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

Thank you for your letter of 7 July 2022 seeking further information from the Scottish Government on Petition PE1938 lodged by Carlie Power 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.

The Scottish Government's current position on whether the scanning of cat microchips should be compulsory in Scotland and in which circumstances this should take place

Additional to the information provided in our letter of 8 June 2022 the Scottish Government does not currently consider that microchipping or the scanning of microchips should be made compulsory for cats at this time.

It is our understanding that veterinary practices scan the microchips of animals presented to them, as a matter of best practice. Scanning at first visit or at the time of yearly check-ups may permit the identification of animals recorded as stolen or missing. However, the Scottish Government shares concerns expressed by UK counterparts that compulsory scanning could inadvertently place an enforcement role on veterinary surgeons, putting them in a difficult situation that detracts from their principal focus of providing treatment and care for the animal. It is not the Scottish Government's intention to place vets in what could be a potentially difficult situation, and we would consider carefully the views of the British Veterinary Association on these matters.

In the event that individuals are knowingly keeping a stolen or unchipped animal, it could potentially lead to an animal not receiving veterinary attention if compulsory scanning was known to be required, effectively putting the animal's welfare at greater risk

Vets and animal welfare organisations scan any stray animals presented to them as a matter of best practice and use any information gathered to

reunite the animal with the owners. The Cats Protection survey of 2021 suggests that the owners of around 71% of cats have accepted the recommendation in the Scottish Government's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats and have voluntarily microchipped their pets.

Whether the Scottish Government believes veterinary staff would benefit from an awareness-raising campaign and/or training in relation to cat microchip scanning.

The Scottish Government considers that those in the veterinary profession will have sufficient knowledge of the benefits of pet microchipping and sufficient experience of scanning to not require further training.

We would of course be content to discuss the matter further with the British Veterinary Association.

Whether the Scottish Government considers the creation of guidance for local authorities on this issue would be beneficial.

The Scottish Government considers that the majority of local authority employees that encounter stray cats will already be employed as dog wardens. These employees enforce The Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016 and have gained experience in scanning animals for compliant microchips.

I hope this reply is helpful to the Committee's consideration of the petition.

Petitioner submission of 11 August 2022

PE1938/F: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

We thank the Scottish Government for their [submission on 26 July](#) to our petition.

The submission notes the Cats Protection survey of 2021 which suggests that the owners of around 71% of cats have accepted the recommendation in the Scottish Government's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats and have voluntarily microchipped their pets. This is the

figure taken from the PDSA Paw Report that DEFRA used to determine that advisory action is not enough. That [same report](#) also urges the Scottish Government to introduce regulations to make microchipping of pet cats compulsory in Scotland. Cats Protection, ourselves, and many other animal organisations back mandatory microchipping on the grounds that it increases the chance of missing cats being reunited with their owner and provides benefits to the cat on animal welfare grounds. Microchips support improved cat welfare by enabling quicker identification of their owner and enabling vets to carry out treatment in discussion with them, if required. The campaign we lead centres around road traffic accidents, and sadly we hear often of cats being euthanised, sometimes with very treatable injuries such as very minor cuts and bruises, simply due to the cat not having a microchip to assist in locating the owner.

Blue Cross stated in 2017 that a staggering 80% of cats that were brought into them were not microchipped, and for those admitted as a stray there was no way to track down their owners, leaving the pet charity to find them a loving new home. This uses valuable resources and prevents them helping genuine strays/ferals. Currently, due to the pandemic and cost of living crisis, more pets than ever are awaiting rescue help, with some shelters having waiting lists into the hundreds. Many cats are sadly being euthanised or being dumped. We have found that many rescue organisations believe a large section of animals in their care, mostly cats, do in fact have owners but there is no way locating them to send the cats home when no chip is present. Although a reasonable majority do microchip their pet, those that don't place strain on local services such as veterinary practices, local councils, and rescues.

In terms of scanning microchips, campaign groups such as Tuks Law and Ferns Law have been campaigning for vets to scan for microchips at first presentation, as well as prior to euthanasia. Both issues were included in a recent DEFRA consultation. The British Veterinary Association has issued guidance for scanning prior to euthanasia, which we believe will soon include cats, but DEFRA are yet to publish further findings and intentions on both issues.

Our campaign, and this petition, does not refer to stray cats, but refers to deceased cats collected by councils that have, most likely, been hit and killed by a car. Employees do enforce The Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016 and have experience in scanning dogs for compliant microchips, but this is not routine for cats. Following years of campaigning and working with local councils in Scotland, the situation has improved in recent years. However, there is still a lot of work to do. The problem when it comes to cats is it tends to be waste departments, rather than dog wardens, who take on responsibility but often do not have microchip scanners. In the majority of cases the cats' remains will be sent to the local waste processing centre and kept in cold storage awaiting disposal. We have found that staff, at all levels, have a lack of understanding about how the process should work to enable owners to retrieve their beloved pet. Through direct contact working with some councils, we have encountered problems from not understanding how the microchip readers themselves work, to having no understanding of how they obtain owners details when they do get them working. Councils have no guidance to adhere to, and it is not uncommon for us to be asked questions which they shouldn't really have to approach us with.

The latest case we are dealing with is a cat called Sushi who lived in Glasgow and was collected by the council's waste teams. Glasgow City Council collected her, did not scan for a microchip, and proceeded to tell the distraught owner, who ended up travelling to the different waste depots to search their cold storage facilities herself, because staff 'didn't want to look at dead animals'. Upon complaint by the family, the council admitted they no longer scan cats because 'the microchip scanner does not work'. We have attempted to work with the council to help resolve this, which could be something as simple as charging the scanner, or potentially donating new scanners if required. Unfortunately, the council were unresponsive, which led to us involving local councillors and MSPs. The family found the council to be extremely unhelpful and, despite causing them further unnecessary distress, with no apology, the Council did manage to remind the family that it is not a mandatory requirement to scan uplifted cats for microchips, nor do they have an obligation to notify owners. Although we fully appreciate it is not the council's fault that a driver likely hit and killed the cat, leaving the council to collect the remains, it is especially traumatic for people to learn their

beloved pet, and part of their family, has simply been disposed of alongside general waste. There are councils that simply do not respect this issue and will likely continue to allow cats and owners to be treated this way, but there are others who would like to have a good system in place, yet they simply need help and guidance on how best to do this. Whether action comes in the form of mandatory action or simply best practice guidance, we urge action in this area.

Petitioner submission of 15 February 2023 PE1938/G: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

In addition to our submission on 11 August 2022, we have a further update/new information to add if we could please. Firstly, we have an update on Glasgow council regarding the scanning of deceased domestic pets which we initially raised as a result of a cat named Sushi. Information on this can be found on our submission PE1938/F. Since this last submission, we have been working with numerous local councillors, mostly Cllr Eva Bollander, who have received a final response from Glasgow on the issue. Sadly, Glasgow council have decided that they will no longer scan cats due to "not having knowledge of any underlying health conditions of the cats, and to protect staff from potential infection during the current climate where the outbreak of avian influenza in Scotland can spread to humans". Of course, we understand the seriousness of the ongoing spread of avian flu. However, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it is unlikely that pets would become infected, and unlikely that people would become infected with the bird flu viruses through contact with an infected wild, stray, or feral animal. The virus is a global issue, and no other UK council has ceased the procedure of scanning of deceased cats and dogs due to fears of staff contracting bird flu as there is just not the evidence from leading experts that this is something people handling deceased animals need to be concerned about. Even if there was cause for concern, not opting to scan domestic pets does not lead to them not having to handle deceased animals as this is part of their street cleaning duties regardless. Unfortunately, we detect little desire overall to offer a scanning option to local pet owners who might sadly find themselves in the position of losing a beloved pet, which concerns us that any effort to work with them beyond the outbreak would be futile. Unfortunately, action from the Government would be needed in some local authority

areas to have an effective scanning system throughout Scotland. As previously stated, this would not increase workload for staff, or place an added financial burden on them due to councils already retrieving and storing these animals anyway, and already possessing the necessary equipment. It is simply a small ask to save the mental torture and heartache of the residents who love and call these animals family.

The second submission we wish to send is that of stakeholder Jillian who runs the organisation Cats Lost and Found West Lothian. Jillian was keen to add her experience working on the front line of scanning and returning lost/found cats, and we felt it important to highlight how important the issue of microchipping and scanning is as people in the community find it in the real world.

Christine Grahame MSP submission of 27 February 2023

PE1938/H: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

Whilst I have an entirely unavoidable commitment on the date of your meeting, I wholly support the introduction of compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland. This would offer the same benefits to cats and their owners as those enjoyed by dogs and dog owners, whereby missing cats can be quickly reunited with their rightful owners. As a cat owner myself I know that some cats, as is their wont, make themselves welcome in other people's homes which can lead to ownership disputes – which microchipping will help avoid.

It would also enable negligent cat owners to be more easily identified which will help improve cat welfare overall.

We know that compulsory microchipping of cats is widely welcomed by the general public, yet the number of cats not microchipped in Scotland is higher than the UK average. In making it compulsory, we seek to redress this imbalance.

Jillian Brown submission of 15 February 2023

PE1938/I: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

I have been watching the debates and following all articles relating to changing the road traffic act to include cats with interest.

I would like to take this opportunity for my submission to be read.

My story starts when I was 9 years old (40 years ago), I witnessed our family cat being hit on the road she was making her way back home. The driver hit her and never bothered to stop; I saw everything somewhere in my mind I remember screaming. My mum went out and picked her little body off the road. I (we) were all heartbroken, I just couldn't understand what had happened and why the car never stopped. I was even bullied at school for witnessing this. It has haunted me to this day, I often wonder if the driver had any regret or just didn't bother or care that a much-loved family cat was killed by their car.

Now 40 years on and the law still hasn't changed from the day I was a 9-year-old child, left heartbroken and sobbing.

I have set up and run a Facebook group called Cats lost and found West Lothian Scotland – please visit this group. It is one of many, that's purpose is to help reunite missing/lost cats with their owners. The number of reports we receive about cats that have been hit and left on the road is staggering. I have retrieved and picked up numerous sadly deceased cats, scan them for a microchip and if one is present the database is checked and contact with the owner is made (if the details are up to date, it makes things a lot easier), it breaks my heart having to make that call but the owners are grateful they know what happened and have closure. They can put their little one to rest.

It is about time the law was changed to include cats, they are usually much loved family pets with a family looking for them – they could be a young person, a child, a single person, a couple, an elderly person their cats matter to them that cat could be the only thing that matters to them in the world, it could be a last link to a memory, my cats matter to me.

Changing the law would be a humane thing to do as cats are also sentient beings. Not an object that doesn't live and breathe.

Having to report hitting a cat I believe will help the owners get closure and the fact the law would recognise that their life's do matter. It would lessen a lot of heartbreak and pain. What happened to me will stay with me until I die but the law change will help the ghost that haunts me rest a bit easier.

If veterinary help had been sought the cat would have lived instead of being left to die an agonising death getting hit again and again. I understand a lot of people might not be able to face what has just happened but if they take a moment to consider the feelings of the owner, sometimes people even deliberately hit cats on the road for whatever sad sadistic reason. There are lots of groups that would happily go and help retrieve the cat, it doesn't cost anything to take the cat to the vet they will happily take it in.

In this day and age there are many more people who have dash cams, ring doorbells and such like that could help enforce someone failing to stop and report hitting a cat.

Also there are more and more reports of how cats were valued during the wars – by protecting food supplies, they raised morale among sailors and troops, they were mascots for some.

So why do they not get their place in the road traffic act and get the recognition they deserve?