

Battersea's response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's request for evidence on companion animal welfare – November 2020

About Battersea Dogs & Cats Home

Established in 1860 to care for abandoned animals, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home aims to never turn away a dog or cat in need of help. We reunite lost dogs and cats with their owners; when we can't do this, we tend to their medical needs and care for them until new owners can be found. We accept any breed of dog or cat, at any age, including those with serious medical and behavioural problems. Our expert team of dog and cat care professionals and veterinary staff give the animals in our care the best possible chance of a fresh start in a happy new home in the UK, or even further afield. There is no time limit on how long an animal can stay with us until the perfect new owners are found.

Battersea's non-selective intake policy means that we often see dogs and cats come to us that have been through the worst kind of cruelty and mistreatment. We see animals that have been abandoned, brought into this country illegally, denied essential medical treatment, physically abused, starved, overused for breeding and even used in dog fighting.

Key statistics

- In 2019, we helped over 5,000 dogs and cats at our centres including 3,213 dogs and 2,476 cats.
- Battersea received 566 animals from other rescues last year, equivalent to 10% of total intake.
- Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, we had an average of 247 dogs and 120 cats at any one time on site or foster
- In 2019 we reunited 528 animals with their owners.
- Our average stay in 2019 was 34 days for dogs and 25 days for cats.
- Through the Battersea Academy we provide practical support and trainings to rescues who deal directly with issues such as puppy smuggling

Executive summary

- The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected the animal welfare sector by reducing resource capacity and reducing charitable income. Many charities are not able to obtain Government funding and there is urgent need for tailored Government support.
- The onset of the pandemic initially drastically reduced the numbers of animals being imported into the UK. However, the large increase in demand for pets during lockdown caused a subsequent increase in importation.
- The extent of puppy smuggling is unclear. However, from the indicative data available it is a widespread issue that the Government must tackle.
- Brexit provides an opportunity to reduce the movement of dogs under six months old through mechanisms including increasing the post vaccination wait period.

COVID-19 impact on the animal welfare sector

COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the animal welfare sector, both operationally and financially. Further detail of this was given to the Committee earlier in 2020, this information has been attached as an addendum to this response for your consideration.

The Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), the membership body for the sector, has worked with Battersea to support rescues throughout the pandemic. On their behalf, we conducted two surveys. The first, covering 150 ADCH members in April showed that 90% had taken measures to deal with the COVID-19 risk.¹ This included 87% stopping rehoming animals, 71% closing their shelters to the public and 54% stopping taking in animals.

Rescues saw demand for pets increase during the initial lockdown, with 65% reporting increased requests to foster dogs and cats and 35% reporting increased interest in rehoming. There is concern within the sector that the rise in demand and increase in supply from disreputable sources could lead to longer-term issues, with higher need for the services of rescues post COVID-19. Indeed, there is an existential triple threat looming over the sector as the winter kicks in, coming from:

- Lockdown puppies showing behavioural issues - although owners will be returning to workplaces in large numbers later than once thought, many people will see behavioural issues emerge this winter, and rescues like Battersea will need to work with owners to help them tackle those or take in the animal if need be.
- Lack of new homes for animals as so many people have rehomed a dog or cat already – this is in some ways a “good problem” as we believe passionately in the benefits of pet ownership, however it will be a practical difficulty in 2021.
- Lack of funds – events have been cancelled, face to face fundraising has been seriously restricted and charity shops have closed. This makes raising money very difficult for rescues, which are almost all privately funded.

Lockdown has severely impacted the sector financially in several ways. Traditional fundraising streams have been eroded such as face-to-face events, and charity shops have faced closures. This has particularly affected smaller rescues who use these as a primary source of income. This is evident in that 47% of the 142 rescues who responded to a survey in May² reported a reduction of more than 50% in their income, and 30% reported a drop of between 20% and 50%. According to the second survey in May which surveyed wider than ADCH members, only 20% of respondents had sufficient funds to survive only until the end of 2020 and a further 22% did not know how long they could keep going.

There is a strong case for Government financial support to sustain critical capacity in the sector. Although certain policies such as the furlough scheme have made a significant positive difference - with Government data showing across the wider charity sector more than 160,000 charity staff were furloughed in the first six weeks of the first lockdown³ -

¹https://www.adch.org.uk/wordpress_shop/wp-content/uploads/coronavirusimpactsurvey-updated-27042020.pdf

² https://www.adch.org.uk/wordpress_shop/wp-content/uploads/FINAL.Covid-Impact-Survey-2-Report.pdf

³ <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2020/07/08/what-can-the-uk-civil-society-almanac-tell-us-about-charities-challenges-now-and-in-the-future/>

many animal welfare sector organisations were not eligible for the Government support provided through the original £750m Frontline Charities Relief Fund launched in April 2020. Indeed, direct Government support to our sector has been almost non-existent.

Through the ADCH, the larger animal welfare organisations such as Battersea have done much to help and support the wider sector through this financial crisis, including establishing an emergency fund for smaller rescues to apply to for grant funding. This fund is limited, however, and we cannot meet the challenges on our own. There are 150 ADCH rescue organisations in all corners of the UK. The vast majority (94%) have an annual income of less than £1m and for these the situation is critical. If the sector shrinks while demand increases, these problems will fall on other rescues, and potentially on Local Authorities who lack the resources even to fully carry out their existing range of statutory functions. We need to work in partnership with the Government to ensure the sector can meet the demand that will surely increase over the winter as a result of COVID-19.

Through the coordination and leadership of ADCH, the sector has to date done very well supporting itself, including through the aforementioned emergency fund, which raised over £310,000 donated by Petplan Charitable Trust, Mars Petcare, and a number of the larger charities. This has so far supported 70 rescues with thousands of dogs and cats continuing to receive essential care and support during the pandemic. ADCH were also able to co-ordinate food donations from Mars Petcare, James Wellbeloved, Purina, Naturesdiet, IAMS, Forthglade and AJM Pet Products worth more than £100,000. These were distributed to ADCH members across the UK who acted as 'collection hubs' for any rescue (ADCH member or not) in need of food when their usual fundraising sources were unavailable. Donations continue to be received and distributed. ADCH continues to work with corporate partners to raise funds and assistance, whilst supporting the sector with regular updates of the implications of COVID secure measures.

Despite the admirable unity of purpose and spirit of working together across the companion animal rescue sector, the economic consequences of lockdown remain stark, and jeopardise its ability to fully meet the expected demand in the future. For smaller rescues it is particularly concerning as the COVID-19 pandemic could mean permanent closure. If the capacity is reduced within the sector while demand for our services increases, the duty will fall on Local Authorities who are the only organisations with statutory duties in relation to animal welfare. This will cause increased pressure on Local Authorities without the extra resources to fully carry out their existing range of functions, and the added animal welfare service. The effect this could have on animal welfare is unclear.

Effect of COVID-19 on puppy movement

Demand for pets drastically increased during the first lockdown period following the COVID-19 outbreak. Battersea research shows that in February 2020 there was an average of 725,160 online searches to buy a dog which increased to 1,574,380 in April, a 217% rise. Whilst only a proportion of these searches will have been converted into actual purchases, it seems clear that interest in dog and cat ownership has increased more than normal during this period. The average asking price for a dog/puppy has also increased at this time,

reflecting the increase in demand. The average asking price on the Pets4Homes website during lockdown more than doubled, from £800 to £1,900.⁴

Data for 2020 from Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES) show a clear effect of COVID-19 and the first lockdown, in that pet movements shrank considerably through the early part of the pandemic but have risen sharply since:

	January	February	March	April	May ⁵	June	July	August ⁶
Dogs entering GB under Balai Directive (ITAHCS)	2,580	2,373	1,321	660	3,220	3,967	4,850	3,916

It is clear from these figures that the start of the initial national lockdown at the end of March 2020 had a profound effect on the numbers of dogs entering the UK, with a sharp decrease in April for Intra-Trade Animal Health Certificates (ITAHCs). Whilst the number of animals entering the country via PETS remained low due to travel restrictions (figures for May are not available as they were not included in an answer to the written question), commercial movements increased. There was a 94% increase in ITAHCs issued for dogs in May - August 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.⁷ The heightened demand during lockdown with static UK supply is encouraging buyers to turn to overseas breeders, and this increased demand likely also signals more illegal and low-welfare puppy importation into the UK,⁸ with all the health and welfare risks that are known to accompany such activity.⁹

The extent of puppy smuggling

There are significant weaknesses in the datasets, and border checks are sufficiently partial, that it is very difficult to assess the scale of puppy smuggling.

It is possible to accurately account for the number of puppies and kittens that enter the UK through legal means, as they will either enter under PETS for non-commercial movement or the Balai Directive for commercial movement. These are recorded through the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and TRACES respectively. It is not however possible to accurately estimate the total level of illegally imported animals - as they either take advantage of loopholes in the legal importation system, weaknesses in border protection activity (such as only carrying out checks during working hours) or are not identified and quarantined at ports.

⁴ Information from correspondence with Pet4Homes

⁵ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-06-01/52515>

⁶ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-04/85115>

⁷ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-06-01/52515>

⁸ <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/news-events/news/2020/pups-drenched-in-oil-are-latest-to-be-rescued-by-dogs-trust-as-cruel-puppy-smuggling-trade-continues-during-lockdown>

⁹ <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/news-events/news/2019/heavily-pregnant-dogs-are-latest-victims-of-horrifying-puppy-smuggling-trade>

It is clear that over the last few years, the number of dogs coming into the UK has risen sharply, and eyewitnesses report that it is illogical to assume that illegal movements have not also increased to a significant degree (see Street Hearts case study below).

Data from APHA for PETS.^{10,11}

	2015	2016	2017	2018 ¹²	2019 ¹³
Total dogs entering GB under PETS	164,836	275,876	287,016	307,357	307,263

Data for ITAHCs issued for dogs entering the UK under the Balai directive, extracted TRACES.

	2015	2016	2017	2018 ¹⁴	2019 ¹⁵
Total dogs entering GB under the Balai Directive (ITAHCs)	28,344	34,017	39,998	38,313	44,563

This data shows a large increase in the numbers of dogs entering the UK between 2015 and 2019 from both commercial and non-commercial sources. This demonstrates that puppy movements are an attractive area of business – many of which will not be from reputable breeders or rescues that carry out full vaccinations on puppies aged 8 weeks or older, with reliable documentation.

APHA data and TRACES data is not published openly and is only available through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests or Parliamentary Questions. The APHA data also does not include the county of origin,¹⁶ which makes it impossible to track the likelihood of these animals coming from likely illegal sources, based on known risk from certain countries where documentation is known to be less reliable.¹⁷ Furthermore, APHA only has a data retention period of three years,¹⁸ making it hard to show long-term changes in demand for puppies from outside the UK.

Battersea recommends that this data is made more readily available, to allow for better tracking of pets travelling across borders and to identify the origin location of animals. This would also be a benefit to animal health by helping to trace and prevent infectious diseases entering the country.

The most detailed information available on the issue of illegal imports is from APHA, which does not hold data relating specifically to ‘smuggled’ animals. However, it does hold data on animals that are ‘illegally landed’, which creates a confusing picture.

¹⁰ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-07-17/164961/>

¹¹ Information supplied by a Freedom of Information request to APHA

¹² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-05-15/254873/>

¹³ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-02-05/13018>

¹⁴ Information supplied by a Freedom of Information request to APHA

¹⁵ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-02-05/13019>

¹⁶ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-05-22/257572>

¹⁷ https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/puppy-smuggling/111018_puppy%20smuggling%202018_final.pdf

¹⁸ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-02-19/223135>

	2016	2017	2018 ¹⁹	2019 ²⁰
Illegally landed dogs from APHA	1,287	1,037	440	404

The only other reliable source of data on the extent of illegal importation is the Dogs Trust Puppy Pilot Scheme,²¹ which ran from December 2015 to July 2018. In that time 1,433 puppies were intercepted from entering the UK under PETS. Of these, 60% were deemed illegal and quarantined.²² Whilst the data from APHA show a decrease over time, we cannot be certain if this because of a reduction of illegally landed dogs or simply fewer coming to APHA's notice. The number of illegal imports remains unclear.

The scale of pet movement within individual vehicles under PETS is a cause for concern, and the Government would do well to consider how this works once the UK has left the EU. On PETS, APHA makes clear:

*'one individual can travel with a maximum of five pets (dogs, cats and ferrets only). Ten pets travelling with two people (at least one of whom must be an adult, the second can be any age) is acceptable. The owner named in the passport should be travelling with the pet. Alternatively, an authorised person can accompany the pets. They should have a document from the owner named in the passport authorising them to accompany up to five owned pets.'*²³

Therefore, 10 animals may enter the country in one vehicle with two people in it if they are classed as owned pets under PETS. Given this allowance for large numbers to travel and insufficient checks at UK border control to check documentation, it is unsurprising PETS has been shown to be used to bring animals into the country for sale - including underage animals. Of serious concern relating to the illegal importation of puppies is the bringing in of diseases not found in the UK. It is not easy to ascertain if they have had the correct vaccinations for rabies, for example, if animals are moved on false passports.

At Battersea we are increasingly seeing dogs with foreign microchips. This may be because they are cheaper for UK implanters, or it is further evidence of widespread animal movement into the UK. Foreign microchips are routinely not scannable by UK scanners so (a) do not help reunite animals with owners and require Battersea to quarantine dogs while they are checked for disease, and (b) are unlikely to comply with the Microchipping of Dogs Regulations. In either case as we cannot scan the chip and find a history, we must assume the most severe outcomes, quarantine the animal and carry out blood tests. Until these are complete, and results returned, the animal must stay quarantined in a kennel, becoming more stressed at considerable cost.

¹⁹ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-02-19/223135>

²⁰ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-02-21/19046>

²¹ https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/puppy-smuggling/puppy%20smuggling%20report_final%20pdf.pdf

²² https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/puppy-smuggling/111018_puppy%20smuggling%202018_final.pdf

²³ <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/external-operations-admin/library/documents/exports/ET140.pdf>

CASE STUDY: STREET HEARTS

Street Hearts are a shelter and neutering programme based in Bulgaria (<https://streetheartsbg.com/>), who both manage populations in country through neutering, and rehome animals across Europe including in the UK. Battersea has worked with the organisation through our Academy, which provides training and best practice for animal welfare organisations. As an organisation which rehomes dogs in the UK with the aid of other rescues, Street Hearts provided Battersea with information on their experience of the importation process and the concerns they have. As a licensed rescue they import their dogs through the Balai Directive and comply with the requirements of ITAHCs.

Street Hearts have concerns regarding the current travel requirements and enforcement, seeing that there was a lack of enforcement and training at the border. Indeed, they have shared that when moving dogs into the UK their documentation is regularly checked at the Channel Tunnel, however their dogs have never been checked.

When coming to the UK, they report to the Pet Reception Service at the Channel Tunnel where every animal's record should be checked and the animal inspected - a service which costs £27 per dog. They have experience of very little enforcement of these requirements, normally only requiring a visual count. They have also witnessed incidental instances where animals were swapped between vehicles before entering the UK, and larger numbers of dogs moving on a Friday as checks are typically less rigorous over the weekend.

It is also customary for their vans, at least until enforcers become used to them, being stopped and searched in Bulgaria, Germany and Belgium. However, they have never been searched in the UK.

Street Hearts would like to see an increase to the wait times after vaccinations (as set out below) so that any dog or kitten needs to be six months' old before entering the country and a lowering of the number of animals allowed per vehicle under PETS. They would also like to see an increased presence of trained officials at the borders to manage and perform full checks on the animals being brought into the UK.

Post Brexit pet travel

According to the latest UK Government guidance, Great Britain will become an unlisted country on 1st January 2021.²⁴ This will mean that pet owners must take specific actions a minimum of four months before they wish to travel, in keeping with Government communications through recent months. This will lead to significant delays for those wishing to travel with their pets to the EU. There is seemingly little public appetite to restrict the ability to take one's pets abroad, however there is clearly a need for clarity for pet owners on what the future holds.

On 8th September DEFRA Parliamentary Under-Secretary Victoria Prentis stated the Government's ambition to tackle puppy smuggling when the UK leaves the EU:

'.... The end of the Transition Period may open up new opportunities for managing our own commercial and non-commercial import and pet travel arrangements. The Government will be considering our pet travel and import arrangements (including

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pet-travel-to-europe-from-1-january-2021>

for puppies and kittens) as part of cracking down on puppy smuggling in line with our manifesto commitment.²⁵

Battersea welcomes this statement. However, we recommend continuing to facilitate travel with pets while reducing the opportunity for puppy smuggling.

Brexit provides an opportunity to significantly reduce the movement of dogs under six months old. Battersea proposes the following policy changes, which need not impact on the ability of UK citizens to travel with their pets:

- The vaccination of puppies for rabies should only be undertaken when they are 12 weeks of age. Battersea believes a post-vaccination wait period for dogs to travel to the UK should be extended to at least 12 weeks, meaning that importing or transporting puppies would be banned from entering the UK until they are at least six months' old. This would have two significant benefits – firstly, it would make puppy smuggling uneconomic as there is nowhere near the market for six month old dogs that there is for puppies; and it would also make enforcement easier as spotting the difference between a young puppy and a six month old dog is much easier than enforcing an import age of eight weeks.
- Better enforcement of border control checks, including spot checks out of office hours, is vital to root out illegally sourced animals entering the UK. There must be more vigorous checking at ports and stricter penalties for those found smuggling puppies, leading to prosecution.
- A requirement should be added for dogs to be treated against ticks before entering the certain countries where specific tick-borne diseases such as babesiosis and ehrlichiosis are not present, to help prevent the spread of these diseases.
- The number of dogs permitted to travel across international borders by non-commercial means should be reduced to three dogs per non-commercial vehicle rather than the current PETS standard of five dogs per person. This will allow for families to still travel with their pet whilst guarding against the smuggling of puppies and kittens under the guise of owned pets.
- Verification of the age of the animal being transported should be added to the border-checking process. For example, the age of a puppy can be indicated by the growth and size of their teeth. To facilitate this, a mandatory training programme for border control officials should be implemented.
- More visual checks should be made of the conditions that animals travel in to help ensure that their health and welfare needs are being met.

The Third Party Sales Ban

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2019²⁶ came into force on 6th April 2020. With this short timeframe, the effect of COVID-19 on the increase in demand of puppies and the hinderance to normal enforcement, it is difficult at this stage to gauge the effectiveness of the legislation; which Battersea and other animal charities welcome as a step forward for animal welfare.

²⁵ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-08-28/82544>

²⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2019/1093/contents/made>

Battersea is aware however, of limitations of the legislation. The Act does not fully take account of animals being transported for sales from outside of England, as has been highlighted by a recent Parliamentary petition.²⁷ Similarly, if the point of sale is in Wales or Scotland this is not covered under the Act. Battersea has raised this concern and the need to close this loophole with DEFRA and with the Scottish and Welsh Governments as they develop similar legislation to tackle the issue. However, it is clear that this presents an opportunity for unscrupulous dealers.

The Act also only applies to licensed businesses under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018²⁸ and therefore does not legislate for sellers that do not require a licence to sell puppies and kittens. There is concern that during lockdown this has caused issues. Battersea is aware of anecdotal reports where puppies were being bought by private buyers and then resold for a profit, making this a legal third party sale (because they weren't reselling in the course of a business) but continuing to prevent buyers from seeing the conditions in which the animal was bred, which is required by law. This is a problem that needs further investigation to ensure that the ban on third party sales is as strong as it can be.

Battersea has welcomed and supported the Government's Petfished campaign,²⁹ and we are hopeful that it will lead to an increased awareness and changed behaviours amongst the public when seeking to buy a pet. As of September 2020 the campaign has had a projected reach of 3 million people. However, COVID has undoubtedly had an impact on the campaign as the demand for puppies increased dramatically during the start of lockdown.

Animal cruelty sentencing

Battersea has long campaigned for increased sentences for animal cruelty, working to increase the maximum sentence in England & Wales from 6 months to five years' imprisonment. We researched and documented the issue in a 2017 report³⁰ and see first-hand so many animals who have been badly treated, abused or abandoned. Many MPs from different parties joined us in 2017 when Battersea first led calls for this change in Parliament; as has the Environment Committee in a previous inquiry.

Battersea appreciates the commitment shown on this issue from MPs of all parties, including Ministers and officials. However, this measure has been before Parliament on several previous occasions; most recently falling before the 2019 General Election.

Battersea's research found that in 2018, 862 people were found guilty of animal cruelty in England & Wales. Nearly a third of these cases resulted in a custodial sentence and some received the maximum term of six months in prison, with an average sentence of 3.6 months. RSPCA Prosecution figures show that this is an ongoing problem. In the two years

²⁷ <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/326261>

²⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/486/contents>

²⁹ <https://getyourpetsafely.campaign.gov.uk/>

³⁰ http://bdch.org.uk/files/Sentences_cruelty_report_England_Wales.pdf

from 2016 to 2018, the number of prosecutions secured in the Magistrates' Court rose by just over 200 to 1,678.

There is also a strong link between acts of violence against animals and acts of violence against people; both of which are reported to have tragically increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study quoted in our campaign report revealed that women in domestic violence shelters were nearly 11 times more likely to report that their partners had previously harmed or killed pets, while children are at risk of neglect or abuse in 83% of families with a history of animal abuse.

The law has already been changed in other areas of the UK and Ireland. The Republic of Ireland raised its maximum prison sentence from 6 months to five years in 2014, Northern Ireland did the same in 2015. In 2020, the Scottish Parliament voted to increase the maximum sentence to five years as part of the Animals & Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill which received Royal Assent in July.³¹

This is a long overdue law change that all parties support. We welcomed the Private Member's Bill brought forward by Chris Loder MP and we welcome that it has passed its Second Reading in October 2020.³² The offences covered by this Bill are serious and significant and we welcome this change to the law, which will see Courts given the tools to treat them as such.

We would urge the Committee to seek a definitive timetable from the Government for the Bill's delivery to avoid any of the issues experienced by previous Bills and to ensure it passes as a matter of urgency.

Recommended questions

- What estimate has the Government made on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on companion animal welfare?
- Given the significant difficulties experienced by smaller charities in particular, what specific financial measures is the Government considering introducing to help the animal rescue sector meet the significant challenges posed by COVID-19?
- Will the Government make data on the commercial and non-commercial importation of companion animals readily available to aid in the tackling of puppy smuggling?
- Will the Government reform the requirements for pet travel and companion animal importation once the transition period is completed? Will they include measures to increase the post vaccination wait period so that any dog or cat entering the UK is at least six months old?
- If the timetable for Private Members' Bills has been significantly delayed by the impact of the changing COVID-19 picture, will the Government provide a definitive timetable for the passage of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill 2019-21?

³¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2020/14/contents/enacted>

³² <https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-21/animalwelfare/sentencing.html>