

Written evidence submitted by Dogs Trust (PS0010)

November 2020

1. About Dogs Trust

Dogs Trust is the UK's largest dog welfare charity. We have a network of 20 rehoming centres across the UK – and one in Dublin – through which more than 14,300 stray and abandoned dogs were cared for last year. We invest substantial resources in information services, community outreach programmes, and education on responsible dog ownership. Since Dogs Trust was founded in 1891 (formerly National Canine Defence League) we have always campaigned on dog welfare issues, and we played an instrumental role in the introduction of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

2. Executive Summary

- Dogs Trust has been lobbying Government for changes to the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) for six years, after the EU harmonisation of the UK travel rules in 2012 led to a significant increase in underage puppies being imported into Great Britain for sale.
- Since 2014, Dogs Trust has carried out four undercover investigations to demonstrate the abuse of the pet travel legislation. Our investigations have repeatedly found evidence of puppies being imported which are underage and without the necessary treatments such as rabies vaccinations in line with the legal requirements. We have found evidence of puppies undergoing traumatic journeys of over 1000 miles/29 hours with no food, exercise or toilet breaks and minimal water.
- In December 2015, Dogs Trust established the Puppy Pilot to provide care and support for illegally imported puppies seized at the ports during their time in quarantine. To the end of September 2020, the Puppy Pilot had cared for and rehomed some 1,310 puppies with an estimated market value of over £2 million. Given the lack of comprehensive enforcement at the ports, this is likely to just be the tip of the iceberg.
- Only a handful of puppy smuggling cases have ever been prosecuted and you can get a longer sentence for smuggling cigarettes than you can for smuggling puppies.
- Demand for puppies has soared since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, with Google searches for 'buy a puppy' increasing by 166% between when the first lockdown was announced in March and the end of July 2020. Our statistics show that prices for some of the UK's most desirable dog breeds have reached record levels in recent months, as some sellers exploit this increased demand.
- One of the clear trends during the height of the COVID-19 restrictions was a switch from importing dogs under PETS to instead importing them under the commercial legislation (Balai Directive). Animals transported via this legislation are not subject to checks at the border. Instead, post-import checks are carried out at the point of destination (up to 48 hours after arrival). APHA have previously confirmed that post-imports checks are carried out on less than 10% of consignments. However, during the first coronavirus lockdown, in person post-import checks were stopped entirely.
- Under the Puppy Pilot, Dogs Trust rescued 140 puppies that were illegally imported into the country between the start of the first COVID-19 lockdown (23rd March) and the end of September. We also rescued 14 heavily pregnant mums during the same period, who gave birth to 56 puppies.
- With the end of the EU Exit transition period fast approaching, the time is now for Government to act. We are calling on the Government to increase the minimum age for puppies to be imported into the UK to six months to help make them less desirable. We would also like to see tougher penalties for smuggling pups to deter deceitful sellers.

3. Recommendations for Government action on puppy smuggling

The illegal puppy smuggling trade has a huge impact on the British public, financially, emotionally, and from a public health perspective, as well as on the potential health and welfare of the animals involved. Currently, both commercial and non-commercial pet movements are regulated by EU legislation. With the end of the EU Exit transition period fast approaching, the time is now for Government to act.

Our priority recommendations for the Government are:

- Raise the minimum age for puppies to be imported into the UK to six months to help make them less desirable. Dogs Trust supports reintroducing a requirement for a rabies blood (titre) test before entry into the UK, together with a wait period post-vaccination which is in line with the incubation period of rabies. This means that the age at which puppies could legally enter the UK would be increased to six months.
- Bring in tougher penalties for smuggling pups to deter deceitful sellers. Only a handful of puppy smuggling cases have ever been prosecuted and you can get a longer sentence for smuggling cigarettes than you can for smuggling puppies.

We also urge the Government to:

- Reduce the number of dogs allowed to travel at one time. Currently it's possible to travel under the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) with 5 dogs per person, however a 2010 study¹ estimated that the majority of UK households owning dogs had only one dog (73.3%), 18.9% owned two dogs and 4% owned three dogs. Therefore, by setting the limit at three dogs up to 96.2% of families would be able to travel with their pet dogs.
- Shift the focus on enforcement of the pet travel legislation from carriers (i.e. the ferry companies and Eurotunnel) to Government agencies and visual checks of all dogs entering the country need to be undertaken, with physical checks where needed.
- Introduce a centrally accessible database to log pets' microchip numbers, their age and date of entry into Great Britain as well as the country of origin.
- Shorten the window for tapeworm treatment of dogs before entry into Great Britain from 24-120 hours to 24-48 hours and reintroduce tapeworm treatment for cats. The current period within which treatment must be administered before travel is too long so the risk of reinfection after treatment and before travelling is higher. Furthermore, the 120 hour window allows dog owners to treat their dogs in Great Britain, and then travel to other EU Member States for the weekend before returning – not in the spirit of PETS but not illegal.
- Reintroduce the requirement for dogs and cats to be treated against ticks.

4. The extent of the problem of puppy, kitten and other companion animal smuggling; and Government statistics on this issue (including their accuracy and timeliness)

4.1. Background

For six years, Dogs Trust has been lobbying Government for changes to the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) after the EU harmonisation of the UK travel rules in 2012 led to a significant increase in underage puppies being imported into Great Britain for sale. The new rules enabled puppies as young as 15 weeks to obtain passports and travel to the UK when previously the minimum age had been 10 months. This means puppies can now enter the country when they are younger and more desirable to potential buyers than older dogs.

¹ Murray, W. J., Browne, M. A., Roberts, A., Whitmarsh, T. J. and Gruffydd-Jones, J. K. (2010). Number and ownership profiles of cats and dogs in the UK. *Veterinary Record* 166, 163-168

Unfortunately, these changes resulted in a drastic increase in the number of puppies entering Great Britain for sale. There was a 61% increase in the number of dogs entering Great Britain via PETS in the first year after the relaxation of the controls. However, the increase was even more significant when looking at individual countries. For example, there was a 780% increase in Lithuanian dogs travelling under PETS into Great Britain between 2011 and 2013.

Annual Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) figures for dogs travelling into Great Britain	
2011 (<i>before changes to PETS</i>)	85,299
2012	139,643
2013	152,075
2014	155,444
2015	164,836
2016	275,876
2017	287,016
2018	307,357
2019	307,263

Popular, desirable breeds of dog such as French Bulldogs, English Bulldogs, Pugs, Chow Chows, Dachshunds, Maltese and Pomeranians are increasingly in demand. Ethical breeders in the UK are unable to meet this growing demand and so dishonest importers are able to sell dogs for increasing profits and evade the law to get these dogs to the UK market. The drive to make a profit, even in the face of legislation, should not be underestimated. The great lengths unscrupulous breeders and traders will go in order to sell puppies on to unsuspecting buyers are testament to the vast profits that can be made, with little chance of being caught and the penalties no deterrent.

4.2. Undercover Investigations

Since 2014, Dogs Trust has carried out four undercover investigations to demonstrate the abuse of the Pet Travel Scheme. Through our four undercover investigations, as well as intelligence from our Puppy Pilot scheme, we have found evidence of:

- Breeders and dealers in Central and Eastern Europe using PETS for the illegal importation of underage puppies into Great Britain for sale;
- Unscrupulous vets falsifying data on pet passports;
- Vets in Serbia (an unlisted Third Country where there is higher rabies incidence) providing pre-filled Hungarian and Bulgarian passports and microchips for underage puppies, so passing them off as EU-bred animals;
- Vets in Lithuania offering to sedate puppies to smuggle them across the border;
- Heavily pregnant females being illegally brought into the UK to allow dealers to dupe buyers into buying 'UK bred' puppies;
- Ineffective border controls and enforcement of PETS at UK ports with Dogs Trust being able to successfully illegally import a toy dog in 5 out of 6 attempts without anyone noticing they were not real dogs;
- Lack of sufficient penalties to deter the illegal trade;
- Puppies as young as 4 weeks entering the UK, well below the legal minimum age of 15 weeks.
- Puppies being transported from Lithuania, across Europe and into Great Britain – a journey of over 1000 miles/29 hours with no food, exercise or toilet breaks and minimal water.

To read more about the findings of all four reports please visit <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/puppy-smuggling/ps-media>.

4.3. The Puppy Pilot

In December 2015, Dogs Trust established the Puppy Pilot to provide care and support for illegally imported puppies seized at the ports during their time in quarantine. By funding the care of these animals and supporting their responsible rehoming, enforcement agencies at the ports have been able to focus on seizures knowing the fate of the puppies is secure with Dogs Trust. To the end of September 2020, the Puppy Pilot had cared for and rehomed some 1,310 puppies. The total market value of these puppies is estimated to be over £2 million². The puppies which have been seized are only the tip of the iceberg, as we have also uncovered significant issues with enforcement of the pet travel legislation.

Through our work on the Puppy Pilot, we are aware of the ever-evolving tactics of importers, facilitated via communicating with one another through online chat rooms. Since December 2015 examples of evolving tactics have included:

- In general, the age of pups being imported is increasing to make it harder for those enforcing the Pet Travel Scheme to detect underage puppies. There has been a noticeable movement towards the importation of puppies from less than 10 weeks old to around 12 to 14 weeks of age, just under the legal minimum of 15 weeks. The exception is in the run up to Christmas when the age of puppies tends to decrease to meet the demand of the Christmas market.
- There has been a worrying development in the importation of heavily pregnant bitches, so their puppies can be sold at a younger age as 'UK born'.
- In our 2017 undercover Puppy Smuggling investigation, we uncovered private vets in Lithuania offering sedatives for importers to administer to puppies before passing undeclared through border checks, to truly smuggle them into the country.

More than 1,310 puppies have been seized as part of the Puppy Pilot project, yet, despite the intelligence gathered, only two prosecutions have been taken forward. This is even more concerning considering many of the puppies are imported by repeat offenders.

Our work on the Puppy Pilot has also demonstrated significant issues with enforcement as there is not sufficient out-of-hours and weekend cover at ports by Government agencies, to enable puppies to be seized. Puppy smugglers are therefore easily able to enter the country by travelling outside of usual business hours.

4.4. Accuracy of Government Statistics

The Pet Travel Scheme statistics are based on data given to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) by the carriers (ferry companies, Eurotunnel, airlines etc.). We have been concerned about how robust this data is as it has previously varied in data supplied by the Government in response to Parliamentary Questions.

In April 2017, Defra responded to PQ number 70622 as follows:

Question: Pursuant to the Answer of 22 March 2017 to Question 66537, for what reason the numbers of dogs imported into the UK from each origin country, as presented in Annex A, do not add up to the number recorded on APHA's system of dogs entering the UK non-commercially under the Pets Travel Scheme, as stated in the Answer of 30 January 2017 to Question 62238.

Government response: Currently, the Pets Database holds information on pet movements into GB on approved routes gathered by transport companies. Since mid-2015 the Animal and Plant Health Agency

² This is based on averages of the prices displayed on the first pages of adverts for the relevant breeds on Preloved and Gumtree if they had been sold by dealers.

(APHA) has been piloting a parallel system to establish the level of accuracy of data available from the Pets Database. This has identified that more dogs are travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme than previously indicated by the Pets Database data, and this number was presented in PQ62238. Based on this finding, APHA is now working on a new permanent system to capture accurately all the required data without placing an unrealistic burden on carriers.

The information that APHA has provided in response to PQ66537 is a true reflection of the information that is held on the Pets Database, as supplied by third parties.

Additionally, in 2017 the Government stopped recording the country of origin of dogs travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme. We believe this data is vital to understanding the key countries involved in the trade and any changing trends and were extremely disappointed by the decision to stop recording it.

One solution to the challenges presented for data collection, which we have previously discussed with APHA, would be to provide all carriers with microchip scanners which can upload information directly to a central database which captures information such as pets' microchip numbers, country of origin and date of entry into Great Britain. This would allow data to be captured in real-time, directly as animals are entering the country, and so would prevent the issues we have seen with the accuracy of the data collection. This does not need to be onerous, as the database would not carry any personal information. The introduction of a centrally accessible database would also allow stakeholders, such as animal welfare organisations and Local Authorities, to undertake a risk assessment when animals with foreign microchips come into their care. Knowing when a dog entered the country is crucial to being able to assess their disease risk, particularly if there were a case of rabies identified.

5. The latest on smuggling, including the impact of COVID-19 on supply and demand, and the effectiveness of enforcement

5.1. Impact of COVID-19 on dog prices

Demand for puppies has soared since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, with Google searches for 'buy a puppy' increasing by 166% between when lockdown was announced in March and the end of July 2020.³

Our statistics also show that prices for some of the UK's most desirable dog breeds have reached record levels in recent months, as some sellers exploit the increased demand for puppies during the pandemic. Our research found that the asking price for some of the UK's most sought after breeds and some of the breeds most often smuggled into the country – Dachshunds, English Bulldogs, French Bulldogs, Pugs and Chow Chows - shot up between March, when lockdown was announced, and October this year. The data reveals the average price increased by:

Percentage increase	Breed	Average price in October	Average price in March
134%	Chow Chows	£2,618	£1,119
73%	Dachshunds	£1,681	£973
49%	English Bulldogs	£2,436	£1,637
70%	French Bulldogs	£2,128	£1,251
78%	Pugs	£1,414	£684

5.2 Impact of COVID-19 on illegal importation – Government statistics

The number of dogs entering the UK via the Pet Travel Scheme dropped dramatically at the height of the COVID-19 restrictions. However, this does not mean imports ceased during this time.

Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) figures

³ Figures sourced from Propellernet, based on Google searches for "buy a puppy" from week commencing 22nd March 2020 and week commencing 12th July 2020.

January 2019	23,504
February 2019	14,046
March 2019	21,969
April 2019	21,124
May 2019	20,221
June 2019	25,676
July 2019	31,398
August 2019	51,208
September 2019	36,712
October 2019	27,826
November 2019	13,707
December 2019	21,013
January 2020	22,454
February 2020	12,160
March 2020	13,233
April 2020	1,546
May 2020	4,433
June 2020	7,423
July 2020	5,423
August 2020	33,413
September 2020	Not yet available
October 2020	Not yet available

Through our work on the Puppy Pilot, we know illegal importers are extremely quick at adapting their tactics to avoid detection. One of the clear trends during the height of the COVID-19 restrictions was a switch from importing dogs under PETS to instead importing them under the commercial legislation, otherwise known as the Balai Directive (Council Directive 92/65/EEC), as commercial transporters were deemed as making essential journeys.

Intra Trade Animal Health Certificates (ITAHCs) are certificates used to document trade in animals between EU Member States and are issued for movements under the Balai Directive. Each certificate can cover a number of dogs in a consignment. When animals are transported via this legislation, they are not subject to checks at the border. Instead the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) conduct post-import checks at the point of destination (up to 48 hours after arrival). APHA have previously confirmed that post-imports checks are carried out on less than 10% of consignments. However, during the first coronavirus lockdown, in person post-import checks were stopped entirely. The number of ITAHCs being issued per month continues to increase and is now at record levels, as shown below. Historically the busiest month was October to facilitate the Christmas market.

Intra Trade Animal Health Certificates (ITAHCs) figures	
February 2019	2,037
March 2019	2,393
April 2019	1,895
May 2019	2,244
June 2019	1,929
July 2019	2,081
August 2019	1,954
September 2019	2,623
October 2019	3,244
November 2019	2,287
December 2019	2,025
January 2020	2,580
February 2020	2,373
March 2020	1,321
April 2020	660
May 2020	3,220
June 2020	3,967
July 2020	4,850
August 2020	3,916
September 2020	5,206

5.3 Impact of COVID-19 on illegal importation – Puppy Pilot statistics

Between the start of the first lockdown (23rd March) and the end of September, Dogs Trust rescued 140 puppies that were illegally imported into the country from Central and Eastern Europe. These pups were destined to be advertised online as UK-bred dogs for extortionate prices, sold to unsuspecting buyers. If sold, the estimated market value of these puppies would have been approximately £266,000.

As part of the Puppy Pilot, we also rescued 14 heavily pregnant mums between the start of the first Coronavirus lockdown and September 2020. These dogs gave birth to 56 puppies worth around an additional £115,000 to cruel smugglers.

Throughout the pandemic, we have also seen a new trend of more illegal importers paying the quarantine fees to get their puppies back, rather than handing them over and avoiding paying the fees. This is driven by the significant increase in dog prices since the start of the pandemic, as explained above, and demonstrates the profit that can be made even after paying to put the puppies through quarantine. Whilst insufficient penalties are available for puppy smuggling, with minimal risk of prosecution, there is little deterrent for deceitful traders.

6. The impact of recent measures including Lucy’s Law and the Petfished campaign, and what other measures should be taken

6.1. Lucy’s Law

In April 2020, ‘Lucy’s Law’ was introduced in England, which prohibits commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens under 6 months old. Dogs Trust is supportive of ending party sales of puppies, as protecting and promoting animal welfare at every step of the breeding and sale process is a significant challenge when puppies are sold through third-party sellers.

However, we remain concerned that this legislation only applies to commercial activities, and anyone breeding less than three litters of puppies per year is not captured. Until we have full traceability (registration and licensing of anyone breeding puppies) this practice will continue, if not from overseas then pups illegally bred in the UK. We are also extremely concerned that there is no statutory obligation to prohibit the sale of a puppy or kitten that was bred outside of England, if the breeder of the puppy or kitten outside of England is also the seller in England and is licensed as a business selling animals as pets under Schedule 1 Part 2 of the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals Regulations⁴. For more information, see a statement from the Local Government Animal Welfare Group here: <https://localgovernmentanimalwelfare.org/the-third-party-ban/>

We have already experienced various ways in which unscrupulous sellers have been able to take advantage of this loophole. Through our work on the Puppy Pilot we have seen an increasing trend in the importation of heavily pregnant female dogs from Central and Eastern Europe. Their puppies are then sold in England to buyers who often think they are buying ‘UK bred’ puppies. In this situation, as the seller would also be the breeder, this is not prohibited under Lucy’s Law.

We have also received reports of breeders based in England ‘swapping’ their breeding bitches so they can increase the number of litters bred and sold without increasing the number of breeding bitches stated on their licence. This includes swapping their breeding bitches with pregnant females from outside of the UK. We strongly believe wording should be added to the Regulations with regards dog breeding, to state that the number of litters bred by a breeder each year should not exceed the number of breeding bitches stated on their licence.

⁴ The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018

6.2. Defra's 'Petfished' campaign

In addition to improving the supply of puppies in the UK, it is also important to also address demand. We have long called for a Government-led behaviour change campaign to enable the public to purchase puppies responsibly. For this reason, we have very much welcomed and supported Defra's 'Petfished' campaign.

One of the challenges for any campaign aiming to change buyer behaviour is that buying a puppy is an emotional purchase. We recently publicised the findings of our 'Choosing My Dog' study which surveyed 2,908 people who bought a puppy in the past seven years. The survey found that:

- More than a third (34%) of people bought their puppy without doing any research.
- A quarter of people (25%) said they only saw their puppy on the day they took them home, not beforehand – rising to 34% among those who found their puppy through a pet selling or classified advertising website.
- Over a fifth of people (21%) didn't think it was important to be able to see the puppy with one of its parents – rising to 34% among those who found their puppy through a pet selling or classified advertising website.

These findings demonstrate the scale of the challenge in any campaign aiming to change puppy buying behaviour, as many people buying a puppy do little research and once they view a puppy, they are likely to walk away with it. However, we welcomed the approach behind Defra's 'Petfished' campaign and recommend the Committee asks Defra about the campaign's impact to date.

6.3. Other measures to be taken

Please see our list of recommendations for Government action in Section 3.

7. The end of the Brexit transition period and the impact on pet travel requirements, plus the situation regarding the NI Protocol and also the PETS scheme

In November 2020, Defra responded to Parliamentary Question number 109477 as follows:

Question: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on the future of pet travel between the UK and the EU after the end of the transition period.

Response: There will be no change to the current health or documentary requirements for pets entering GB from the EU from 1 January 2021, in the immediate term. This is to ensure a smooth transition.

The Department has submitted an application to the European Commission to become a 'Part I' listed third country in relation to non-commercial movement of pet dogs, cats and ferrets from the UK into the EU. Acceptance of this application would mean very similar documentation and health requirements to those that are required now for pet owners and users of assistance dogs travelling to the EU. The Commission is considering our application.

The requirements for entry to the EU after the end of the transition period are dependent on the UK's listed status and information on requirements will be communicated via further updates on GOV.UK. It is the duty of a responsible Government to adequately prepare those who travel with pets to the EU under any listing scenario, including in the event that GB becomes an unlisted third country. We issued guidance in early August to ensure that those who wish to travel with their pet on the 1st January 2021 will be able to do so. We have recommended that pet owners visit their vet four months in advance of travel to the EU.

We have also asked Defra directly about the impact on pet travel, as well as commercial pet movements, between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and received a similar response. The situation is currently unclear whilst waiting for confirmation of whether the UK will be accepted to be a 'Part I' listed third country.

This uncertainty is extremely concerning whilst there are now only weeks to go until the end of the transition period at the end of December 2020. Many pet owners may be unaware of the need to visit their vet four months in advance of travel to the EU and it is extremely difficult for organisations which move animals responsibly and legally to plan for changes which may be introduced at extremely short notice.

We are also concerned that there will be no immediate change to the requirements for pet animals entering the UK, and no clear plan or timeframe for when the Government will review the UK's pet travel rules. We have been presenting evidence and calling for Government action on this issue for over 6 years, yet we have seen no significant Government action to date. The end of the Brexit transition period presents a momentous opportunity for the Government to holistically amend the UK's pet travel rules. We believe the Government must now take action urgently.

8. COVID-19 and the impact on the companion animal welfare sector including the finances and demand for services of the charitable sector, and Government support.

This unprecedented crisis has had a significant operational and financial impact on the work of Dogs Trust. Like many other charities we are anticipating a significant reduction in overall income as a result of the impact on our fundraising activities, reserves and legacies. At the same time, we are trying to manage the immense strain on our resources as a result of a reduced workforce and not being able to rehome as many dogs due to COVID-19 restrictions, as well as facing increased demand for our services including pet advice and our rehoming and fostering services.

8.1. Financial impact

Like all charities, Dogs Trust is being hit hard by this crisis. For the five-year period of 2020 – 2024 we have projected a £60 million loss in our budgeted income. This year alone we are projecting a reduction in expected income of around £15 million, which will have a profound impact on our services right across the UK. This is due to the impact on:

- **Fundraising activities** - our public and corporate fundraising activities have been significantly impacted by the pandemic:
 - Our national fundraising programmes including face to face collections have all been significantly reduced or cancelled.
 - Our fundraising programmes in partnership with commercial organisations have all been either cancelled or postponed.
 - At the height of the restrictions and in response to more local lockdowns, Dogs Trust's network of 40 charity shops have been closed or on restricted opening, so too have as our network of 30 Dog Schools. Our 20 Rehoming Centres all stopped rehoming at the start of lockdown and then moved to only limited rehoming. Although the situation has been changing as the level of restrictions evolve, both our retail income and our operational income have been significantly reduced and this will be further impacted by the second national lockdown in England.
 - Our extensive network of community fundraising events across the country from the London Marathon down to smaller local events have all been either cancelled or postponed.
- **Legacies** - legacies provide an important source of income for charities and this is anticipated to significantly decline. Legacy Foresight, the legacy modelling body, has modelled a decrease in legacies of between 9-27% due to the drop in share prices, static or decreasing house prices, sales not going ahead as a result of the lockdown and reduced GDP.
- **Reserves** - Dogs Trust's standard and capital build reserves have both suffered significant losses of income as a result of the overall decline in the investment markets.

Historically, Dogs Trust has received no Government funding to deliver our lifesaving work. Whilst we have benefited from general business support packages such as retail grants or furlough during the pandemic, the UK Government has not targeted any support directly towards companion animal welfare activity nor has Dogs Trust been eligible for any of the wider charity sector support packages.

8.2. Impact on our services

- **Reduced rehoming capacity** – Throughout the pandemic, Dogs Trust has continued to take in dogs but at a reduced capacity. Our 20 rehoming centres had to initially close to the public, however staff continued to work to ensure the safety and welfare of all the dogs in our care. When practical we moved to trial virtual and distanced rehoming which allowed some dogs to find homes, and our centres were able to partially reopen for appointment only visits with COVID-19 safety measures and protocols in place. The situation is evolving with different levels of restriction in place across the UK and our rehoming continues to be significantly decreased compared to 2019. For example, in April we saw an 88% decrease in year on year rehoming.
- **Increased demand for dogs** - We have witnessed a marked increase in demand for dogs during the lockdown period, with Google searches for ‘buy a puppy’ increasing by 166% after lockdown was announced⁵. People have been acquiring a dog whilst they have more time at home but we are concerned that once they start returning to work or returning to a more normal routine and/or are impacted by the possible recession and potentially cannot afford to care for their dog, many of these dogs may be relinquished into the care of charities like Dogs Trust.
- **Limited access to veterinary care** - to meet social distancing guidelines vets have been (rightly) prioritising emergency treatment throughout the pandemic. This resulted in limited access to routine veterinary treatments such as vaccination and neutering. Although this has been changing as the COVID-19 restrictions change, there will be an inevitable backlog of neutering to be carried out, as well as vaccination courses needing to be restarted. Owners are also likely to not be accessing veterinary care due to socio-economic pressures or having to delay treatment during lockdown and so we are concerned about the ongoing impact of this on dog health. In addition, there is an increased pressure on our vets and vet nurses to adapt to video consultations rather than being able to assess dogs in person.
- **Increased demand for our services** - Following the financial crash of 2008 there was a cumulative 30% increase in stray dogs in the subsequent three years⁶. We are aware that relinquishment and abandonment could similarly occur as families struggle to care for their pets in these challenging times. Dogs Trust is anticipating up to 40,000 dogs could be at risk of abandonment in the coming years due to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, if some charities in the sector are unable to continue operating, there will be an increased demand on those still operating.
- **Increased demand for dogs** - We have witnessed a marked increase in demand for dogs during the lockdown period, with Google searches for ‘buy a puppy’ increasing by 166% after lockdown was announced⁷. People have been acquiring a dog whilst they have more time at home but we are concerned that once they start returning to work or returning to a more normal routine and/or are impacted by the possible recession and potentially cannot afford to care for their dog, many of these dogs may be relinquished into the care of charities like Dogs Trust, further increasing the demand for our services.
- **Reduced workforce** – in addition to furloughing staff, we have been working with a reduced work force due to the rules around self-isolation. We peaked at 68 staff out of 773 centre staff being unable to work due to shielding or self-isolation. Currently, 7% of our staff members are on full time furlough and 49% are on flexible furlough. For safety reasons we also had to take the decision to ask our volunteers not to give their time, instead advising that they stay at home and keep safe.

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⁵ Figures sourced from Propellernet, based on Google searches for “buy a puppy” from week commencing 22nd March 2020 and week commencing 12th July 2020.

⁶ <https://faanalytics.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/straydogssurveysummaryreport2011.pdf>

⁷ Figures sourced from Propellernet, based on Google searches for “buy a puppy” from week commencing 22nd March 2020 and week commencing 12th July 2020.