**Best Practice Guide for the Handling of Deceased Cats.**

A cat wearing glasses and reading a book

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CatsMatter are proud to be leading the way in changing the way our cats are handled by local authorities. Our primary goal has always been to ensure drivers stop if they hit a cat, help wherever possible and report the incident, with the intention of making sure cats stand the very best chance of survival if the worst does sadly happen.

When drivers fail to do the right thing, cats are left to be collected by local councils. Although we strongly fight for cats never to be left long enough for councils to collect them in the first place, it is sadly sometimes the case that they are. Given our own personal experience of never having closure due to a council having no scanning or storing procedure in place, we have continuously fought over the last 4 years to help fix the broken system and make sure others don't have to endure the same pain.

Campaigning at the local level has resulted in 59 councils successfully adopt a scanning procedure. Now, thousands of cats over the coming years can be reunited with the owner who can receive some closure and lay their cats to rest at home where they belong. Nationally we have seen victories in London, where [**our motion**](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/call-for-dead-cat-scans) passed with a unanimous vote resulting in all new Transport for London (TFL) contracts to include the scanning of ALL domestic pets found on their network, from rivers, tube stations to roads. We also worked with the Department for Transport (DFT) who conducted a speech at the 2018 National Association of Waste Disposal Officers seminar on our behalf, as well as creating a private group discussion between us and county councils to help promote better practices. With the help of DFT, we also secured a tightening of Highways England's current procedure. Appearances at the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament resulted in both nations becoming all scanning, as well as Northern Ireland where we managed to bring the number of local councils not scanning down to zero. We also worked with the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure who agreed to implement scanning throughout their depots nationally. We continue to work with all 4 nations on this issue.

However, simply getting councils to scan is only part of the battle in getting cats and dogs home when collected by councils. Yes, dogs are treated exactly the same as cats when collected by local councils. We surveyed all councils around the UK to get a clear understanding of what was happening out there, beyond general scanning. Although councils now have procedures in place, there are many other factors which need to be working well to make sure pets go home. When we say a procedure, this comes in many different forms. Some councils scan/store on site, others use local vets or pet crematoriums. Some have external contractors or even have arrangements with local rescues who will go on site to scan/return bodies.

There are also issues in the areas of collection, storage, equipment usage, recording, notifying and staff awareness.

We continuously work with councils to encourage the very best policy possible, from continuous advice, making arrangements for external scanners to go in to the depots to scan, to the donation of the scanning and storage facilities themselves.

It is not uncommon for councils to approach us and ask questions around the scanning and storage procedure. We have never gone public with names or details due to wanting to keep that trust they have with us, so this work goes on in the shadows. This trust was especially beneficial when it was repaid during DEFRAs research into the upcoming microchip legislation when some councils entrusted us with sensitive data to use in the research to help boost the case for microchipping and scanning. Believe it or not, some councils stand firmly behind us and want a law change too.

Many councils do want to have an effective system in place, but they simply don't know where to go for advice for this as there is currently no official guidance. Having spoke to DEFRA about this, it was agreed that our best practice guide would be worked on to become official government guidance for councils. While this is being worked on alongside the [**upcoming microchip legislation**](http://www.catsmatter.org/microchipping), we have decided to take action in the mean time and send our best practice guide to ALL local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This process is currently underway with already some promising results back.

We wanted to share with our supporters some of the issues we are raising with councils and the areas we are advising on and working with them to improve. This guide aims to show some of the complex issues and highlight how an effective system goes way beyond just the scanning of cats and dogs. Here we highlight some of the obstacles to people having their cat returned by local councils, and the advice we are giving to councils to help combat this. We do this because every single cat matters and deserves dignity in death, as well as knowing all too well that cats are family and owners need that chance to say goodbye properly and have some closure.

**What is a microchip?**

A microchip is a small, grain of rice sized chip, implanted on the back of a domestic animal’s neck. Dog owners must microchip their dogs by law, as soon will cats. PDSA Animal Welfare (PAW) report figures show that 68% of UK cats are now microchipped. Following a national survey, we found that councils report between 1/4 – 1/7 cats collected were found to have a microchip. The reason(s) councils’ figures do not match other national databases, are for varying reasons and often mirrored on occasion by some rescue centres. Some of those reasons are listed in this guide, and simple ways to combat them are accompanied.

Owners microchip their cats so they can be informed of instances where their beloved pet may need veterinary assistance, they become lost, or so they are at least afforded closure should the worst sadly happen. For microchips to be used to their full potential, authorities must aim to locate a microchip on domestic pets collected from the roadside.

**Reporting incidents**

The reporting of deceased cats found tends to be one of the major complaints from residents and pet owners searching for a lost pet. Generally, residents will call the councils main customer service number, and callers sometimes become confused if they meet an automated service, leading to being directed wrongly or being informed wrongly. Call handlers in each department should be briefed on the council’s correct protocol and either record incidents, cross reference information on a central log, or transfer people to the correct department. Often customer service agents will not be aware of the deceased animal collection protocol and advise callers completely wrong.

In terms of online reporting, many council websites request accounts to be set up. Persons simply phoning to notify the council of a deceased animal, usually on scene via a mobile phone, want a swift service and deny requests to set up an account. It is advised to review the online reporting section, so it is easily accessible to residents and contact numbers are easily obtainable. Otherwise persons may abort reporting the animal.

Creating a log, which is accessible to all departments, allows customer service agents to swiftly take details of a deceased cat found, along with allowing them to swiftly cross reference a pet owners information with cats collected so as a swift identification can take place. It has also been known that call handlers tell pet owners their cat could be at one of several depots, leaving the owners to drive around the depots themselves, to be met with confused workers who tend to allow owners to look through freezers with all collected animals in. This is unacceptable and unnecessarily distressing for an already grieving owner. The cats details on system should include details of which depot the cat is currently at, followed by a direct phone number or details of the process the owner now has to follow to swiftly collect their cat.

**Collection**

As with all reports, street cleaners are to obtain the details immediately to arrange collection. Often street cleaners find the animal has been removed by a member of the public themselves due to the elapsed time between reporting and collection. Between the reporting of incidents to the collection, it is not uncommon for the general public to have already moved the cat, so a swift collection should be considered and callers advised when there may be a delay in collection.

Street cleaners who come across a deceased cat should follow their specific protocol, which could either be to report it immediately to the contractor for removal and scanning, or collect the cat themselves. There has been numerous reports of street cleaners putting cats in bins or bushes in the past, and this must be stressed by team leaders this will not be tolerated.

Cats should be individually separated upon collection in preparation for scanning/storage at the depot. Log sheets could be attached for simple processing at the other end. This would include details such as date, location collected, and brief description of the cat. This information would be later logged on to the internal systems for cross referencing.

**Scanning**

A microchip reader is an easily obtainable, inexpensive handheld tool which will pick up details of a microchip in a matter of seconds using passive radio frequency identification.

UK microchips are inserted either under the skin on the back of the neck between the shoulder blades, or in the left side of the neck. Some foreign microchips can be inserted on the opposite side. However, microchips can migrate all around the body, so it is advised to check the entire body should the reader fail to locate a chip in the common area. This should take only a matter of seconds.

Domestic pets that the local authority will handle tend to be mostly those that have been involved in a road traffic accident. Although rare, microchips are susceptible to breakages and malfunctions as a result of high impact collisions, and it is suspected this goes a small way to explaining the low numbers councils report as being microchipped. Therefore, it is advised proper logs are made to aid pet owners with other details.

Microchip readers can vary on cost depending on location purchased and brand. The current most popular one used by charities and scanning organisations is the Halo microchip scanner. The Halo device’s popularity is due to its easy light weight handling, rechargeable batteries and scanner angel technology. Direct from Halo, scanners cost between £39.99 - &48.99, with reduce cost for multibuys.

Each local authority has varying numbers of depots. Those with multiple depots should each have access to their own microchip reader to ensure all cats collected are scanned, not just those who are sent to equipped depots. Should only specific depots have scanning and storage facilities, and the council will not upgrade additional depots, it should be arranged that domestic pets are sent to those with the necessary equipment only.

**Obtaining owners details**

Should a microchip reader locate a chip, it will produce a long number across the screen. You would be surprised at how many councils thought the scanner would instantly show an owners details, such as name and phone number, on screen. Not to mention some believing a number flashing up meant the animal did not have a microchip. Simple communication and helping them understand the equipment has made a massive difference in some areas of England.

For local authorities to then be able to obtain the owners details, they will need access to the database system. To obtain this, all local authorities need to do is send a letter headed request for an access pin/vet code to the microchip companies address. Once the code is received, they will have full access to the database enabling them to easily make contact to inform residents of their pet’s fate. Local dog/animal wardens most likely already possess valid access and authorisation rights to the database as all were equipped with the scanning technology following the microchipping of dogs legislation in 2016. .

Overseas microchips, which have not been updated to UK chips, are found on occasion. They occur for reasons such as, owners did not update their cats’ microchips when relocated to the UK, they have been imported illegally or the cat accidently boarded a train, lorry, boat or plane – it happens. The microchip will pick up a foreign microchip, although it may appear as if the chip has not been registered due to being registered to an overseas database. There are easily accessible sources which will enable searches of these microchip numbers should the local authority wish to do so: [**Europetnet**](https://www.europetnet.com/pet-id-search.html) [**Checkachip**](http://www.checkachip.com/)

**Cats Not microchipped/details out of date**

Local authorities can not be held responsible should a pet owner either not microchip their pet, register its microchip or keep the details up to date. However, it may appear there is no microchip due to their malfunction, break in a road collision or the reader perhaps simply did not pick it up. Human error can also play a part, such as improper scanning techniques or the microchip reader having lost power. A simple, quick and easy guide to minimalize human and equipment error can be found [**here**](https://www.alleycat.org/resources/how-to-scan-a-cat-for-a-microchip/).

It is also possible a microchip reader will not detect a microchip if the animal has long, thick, matted fur around the implant site, or excessive fat deposits around the region. Collars with significant amounts of metal on can also interfere with detection.

If all has been tried and still no microchip is present, cats should be placed in the storage facilities for the allotted period, and details logged so as to cross reference with residents’ queries. Good record keeping will enable people to locate their cat if no chip is present, hopefully before the disposal deadline. Councils must give all cats, microchipped or not, that chance for an owner to locate them.

**Recording**

The breakdown in communication between pet owner and local authority tends to be as a result of improper record keeping. Staff are unable to answer distressed pet owners’ questions, or give misinformation. To the pet owner it appears the council are just disposing of cats without any checks, regardless of it sometimes not being the case and the error comes down to one person failing to record properly.

Local authorities with good record keeping can deal with the situation swiftly. Logs should be made from the point of initial reporting, right through to final disposal. This will enable staff to alert owners of the process that took place, where their cat is now and how they can retrieve them. Good record keeping ensures animal details can be cross references at all points. Some local authorities keep the log on a central database so both call handlers and waste staff can access the details at all times in preparation to cross reference details. Others prefer to pass calls of this nature direct to the relevant department solely.

All call handlers and depot employees must be briefed and have an understanding of the procedure to minimalize confusion and callers being passed from department to department, as so often happens. It is sometimes the case that only a limited number of persons in a particular department will hold the details of animals collected, or have access to the scanner. We have also known it to be the case where just 1 person on site has been trained and is permitted to use the microchip scanner, and when he was on holiday for a fortnight one time, no cats collected in that period were scanned.

Leeds council opts to [**publish records online**](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/environmental-health/dead-cats-and-dogs-register) which enables residents to instantly cross reference information against those of their missing pet. This option limits confusion amongst owners and reduces resident numbers phoning with queries. To accompany public records such as these, it should be made clear on the website how residents can contact the department if a description matches their missing cat and what process they must take to retrieve them.

Residents, should they believe they have found a match, may wish to collect their pet for home burial/cremation. The local authorities who offer this service currently, tend to simply box the cat up ready for collection and owners will collect from the depot during working hours. Although all owners appreciate the confirmation and closure, not all owners opt to collect their pets remains. Sometimes staff may warn the cat is in a distressing state, and owners chose to allow the council to cremate their pet so as they can remember them as they were. Whatever the owner chooses to do, they should be given the option.

**Storage**

Should a local authority choose to store on site, animal tend to be stored in general chest freezers for a period ranging anywhere between 24 hours to a month. Some do not have a set period and timing depends on when the animal arrived at the depot and when the freezers are due to be emptied. This could be a week, or barely 24 hours.

The most common time frame tends to be 1-2 weeks. Understanding councils can't hold cats indefinitely, we support the two week time frame as this gives ample time for those with no/broke microchips to have some chance of being reunited with their owners.

Councils can, and often do, cost save on storage facilities by obtaining chest freezers from their own recycling centres. Cost to run the freezers are generally low cost and adhere to health and safety requirements for the storage of animal by-products.

For further information on the handling and storage animals and information on how to obtain the necessary approval forms, see [**here**](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/handling-and-storing-animal-by-products).

**External options**

It is not uncommon for local authorities to use local rescues, private scanning groups, veterinary practices or local pet crematoriums. Each option tends to be uniquely suited to each local authority and arranged privately. Some local authorities chose to take domestic pets direct to the external site, others have private working arrangements where volunteers attend the depots on an arranged schedule to scan the animals in storage. Multiple agencies around the UK have arrangements of this nature set up. In some cases, when a volunteer from a rescue/scanning group obtains chip details on site, they will also offer to contact an owner and return the animal. This tends to work extremely well and we ourselves have worked alongside many organisations in certain regions to gain these results. The private scanners simply want what we and pet owners want, for owners to have the chance to be notified and say goodbye, and essentially do all the work for the council. Recently, Falkirk council worked with ourselves and local rescue [**Lyns Small Animal Rescue**](https://www.facebook.com/LSAR14/), and now the local rescue goes to the depot on a weekly basis to scan domestic pets stored in the freezers and, when an up to date chip is found, they contact the owners and return the cats body should the owner wish.

Many local authorities choose to use vets who will scan, store and return animals. However, should a microchip not be found, and no owner comes forward in the allotted time, the cost of cremation falls to the local authority. Local authorities do have arrangements in place for this and, although costs vary, they are substantially lower than what the general public would pay for cremation. Each arrangement is unique and is to be arranged with the council’s local veterinary practice of choice. Details of each regions veterinary services can be obtained [**here**](https://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/home/).

In cases where a local authority uses a contractor, amending contracts mid-term may incur a cost. This cost can vary and is to be discussed between parties to find an agreement. Should an agreeable solution not be found at that time, the scanning of deceased domestic pets for microchips should be included in the new contract when it next goes to tender.

**Out of hours**

Waste contractors/street cleaners usually work within contracted hours. This means, should someone phone to report a cat on Friday evening, some teams will not be available to collect until some point on Monday. By this time, the cat has long been removed by someone else. If this is the case for any council, rarely is this explained to persons reporting a deceased animal, or those calling in search of a missing pet.

Out of hours services tend to be the most common underlying cause of complaints we receive from people asking for help in search of their missing cat. Neither cat nor owner can help the time the cat was hit by a car, nor can employees do very much when the relevant team are not currently available. However, there is a perfectly feasible way of handling the issue, which minimalizes later strain on the council, most notably in the depot when normal working hours resume with staff unaware of what has been advised out of hours, and stops unnecessary upset for already grieving and stressed pet owners. Pet owners, as well as the general reporting public, appreciate honesty and the knowledge the council sympathises and is willing to offer honest and helpful advice. Not brush them off knowing someone else will deal with it at a later date.

We have worked with councils previously on ideas for out of ours call handler scripts, which appear to work extremely well. They stop confusion and frustration, both from distraught cat owner as well as call handlers who are unsure themselves. Quite often we hear of call handlers telling residents to ‘’put the cat in the nearest public bin’’, and this tends to be out of hours this is said. This is unacceptable.

Although council policy tend to be to only collect deceased animals from public places, as opposed to private property, it could be useful that the council make arrangements with the deceased animals finder. Should a resident call to report a deceased cat in the road, knowing street cleaners will be unable to collect for 48+ hours, the finder could be asked to box the cat for collection curb side at the next available collection time. This will also save the council later going to collect the cat and finding it has since been removed, as is often the case.

Maintain out of hours log and continue to log date, animal description, street name, caller name and phone number if consented, etc. Include details of what was discussed with caller.

**Council microchip service**

Microchipping tends to take place by a veterinary surgeon or rescue centre, yet local authorities also sometimes have microchipping services available that residents may not be aware of. With the introduction of The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations in 2015, some councils offered free microchipping for dogs. Currently, many dog warden services still offer this, and it has been extended to cats in some areas. Dog wardens sometimes also offer home visitations, and reduced cost microchipping in some cases.

To promote responsible pet ownership in the district, councils should consider extending this service to cats and work on promoting this service to make residents aware the council has schemes on offer. Home visits and reduce costs are particularly beneficial to residents on low incomes, as well as residents with mobility issues. Some local authorities also hold regular microchipping events where, for example, owners will pay £10 to bring their pet along to have them microchipped, or £15 for the dog warden to make a home visit. Although primarily offered to dogs, it is urged this service extend to cats where it is offered. This would also be beneficial for the community and local veterinary practices and rescues.

**Microchip databases which meet government standards.**

• Animal Microchips

• Animal Tracker

• Chipworks

• Identibase

• MicroChip Central

• MicroDogID

• National Veterinary Data Service

• Pet Identity UK

• Petlog

• PetScanner

• ProtectedPet

• SmartTrace

• UK PETtrac

A cat holding a telephone

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When a resident phones out of hours to report a deceased cat, it is unlikely cleansing staff will attend the scene and collect the cats remains for some period after, potentially up to 48 hours in some cases. This results in members of the public removing the cat themselves, usually in public or private bins, or wildlife take them. This then causes unnecessary confusion and frustration for pet owners trying to locate a pet they have been informed the council collected, and for council staff who later try to locate records, or the cat themselves, in vain.

When persons phone to report a deceased cat, call handlers should be honest and explain the situation and likely time frame of collection. Confusion and anger regularly takes place due to callers being told a cat will be logged and collected, and later there is no record of this nor are owners/finders able to later locate the cat. Its unnecessary for persons to be calling around the council, and each depot, when maintained up to date records can simply save all this. In some cases, due to timing, the cat was never collected in the first place, even though it was reported.

Another option would be to suggest securing the cat in a bag inside a box and placing in a secure garage/outhouse to ensure no wildlife can get to them, and of course in a location where the box cannot be mistaken for general rubbish and be disposed of by another person. Once the local vets open again, it could be advised to take the box there where they will scan the cat and locate an owner where possible. Perhaps the council could consider, given the out of hours nature of the call, allowing residents to store the cat as above, and collecting from the roadside when normal operating hours resume. Council policy is to collect animals from public, not private land, but this could be a feasible option at the council’s discretion.

In addition, advise a local rescue will likely be able to attend the scene to do a free roadside scan of the animal and, where possible, return them to owner or have them respectfully cremated. As is the case for the scanning of bodies in some areas, councils could privately make arrangements with local scanning groups and/or a local rescues so a working partnership is pre-established for out of hours help.

Log details of conversation and what was advised. This will come in useful should, as so often is the case, the owner of the cat discovers the council was called to collect their cat, yet all are unsure what happened to the cat beyond that. Owners appreciate swift and factual information, and it would be very simple to achieve on the councils part.