



HM Government

# Pet Theft Taskforce

## Policy paper



September 2021



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# 1. Forewords

Forewords from the Secretaries of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice.

## Foreword by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

We are a nation of pet lovers. Pets are much loved members of the family in households up and down the country, and reports of a rise in pet theft have been worrying. Pet owners shouldn't have to live in fear, and I am pleased that the Pet Theft Taskforce that we launched earlier this year has developed a series of recommendations to ensure that we can stop criminals in their tracks and give peace of mind to pet owners.

Throughout the pandemic, pets have been a source of comfort and company. Sadly, there were an estimated 2,000 incidents of dog theft reported in England and Wales alone in 2020. While it is already a criminal offence to steal a pet, the emotional impact of having a pet stolen is undeniable – on both the owner and the animal. One of the recommendations that we will be developing further is the introduction of a new pet abduction offence, reflecting the fact that pets are not just property. A purpose-made offence for pet theft will ensure that those who steal pets are punished accordingly.

We will be taking forward recommendations on microchipping, and exploring new requirements to register more details on dog microchip databases; a single point of access, and; enabling changes of keeper to be tracked more closely.

We are committed, across government, to working with the devolved administrations, police forces, operational partners and animal welfare organisations to tackle pet theft. This work will complement what we have already done. Earlier this year, the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act received Royal Assent. The maximum prison sentence for animal cruelty has been raised from six months to five years, allowing courts to take a firmer approach to cases such as dog fighting. These more stringent sentences are amongst the toughest in Europe and send a clear message that the mistreatment of any animal will not be tolerated.

Since 2010, we have made microchipping mandatory for dogs, modernised our licensing regime for dog breeding and pet sales, and banned the commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens. We have recently launched proposals to crack down on puppy smuggling and ban the import of dogs with cropped ears or docked tails. There is absolutely no place in this country for animal cruelty of any kind, and we must make sure that those who abuse animals are met with the full force of the law. We will take forward action on each of the interventions recommended by the Taskforce to make sure that we tackle pet theft from end to end and safeguard the welfare and safety of pets.

**The Rt Hon George Eustice MP**

**Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

## Foreword by the Secretary of State for the Home Department

Stealing a pet from its loving owners is a particularly cruel crime, causing heartbreak for families and great distress for the pet. There have been very concerning reports about an increase in the number of these crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic, driven by a rise in the price of some of our most beloved breeds. This is a serious crime that has to be prevented. That is why we established the Pet Theft Taskforce.

The Pet Theft Taskforce has engaged a number of key organisations and experts in the field to shine a light on the existing evidence, considered the issue from end to end, and set out a package of specific recommendations. It is clear that we need government, operational partners, and others to work in close collaboration to keep our communities and pets safe.

The Government's promise to the public through the Beating Crime Plan, published in July, is that every crime matters, every victim matters, and every neighbourhood matters. The Beating Crime Plan shows how we are going to cut crime, setting out a clear path for fewer victims and a safer society for all.

We are continuing to drive progress, including through the successful delivery of almost half of the 20,000 extra police officers promised by 2023. Through the Safer Streets Fund – the Government's flagship crime prevention programme – we have committed to investing £70 million for crime prevention projects across England and Wales; empowering and supporting communities and businesses to tackle crimes such as burglary, robbery, and theft through the deployment of simple, well-evidenced preventative measures like CCTV and increased street lighting.

It is clear, pet thefts should be reported to the police and those who commit these crimes should be brought to justice.

Stealing pets is evil and depraved. It brings profound unhappiness. It cannot and will not be tolerated.

**The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP**

**Home Secretary**

## Foreword by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

Our pets are much loved companions and members of our families. When one of them is taken, the distress caused – both to the animal and their owner – is immeasurable. I am determined to protect as many families as possible from going through that ordeal.

This report provides us with an invaluable insight into the issues and complexities of pet theft. It is the starting point for a new approach and a better way of rising to the challenges associated with this abhorrent and devastating crime.

This collaboration between government departments, the Police, CPS, local government and Border Force alongside stakeholders and experts in the field has produced a comprehensive set of recommendations to address this issue head on.

It is great to see such a huge amount of work is already underway. By working together, the police and government departments have set in train a number of initiatives that are seeing significant successes. I agree wholeheartedly that we must improve public awareness of these schemes – so that more owners can benefit and perpetrators will be deterred from stealing pets.

The creation of a new offence of pet abduction is absolutely the right approach because it recognises that pets are more than mere property which can often be replaced, but sentient beings. It acknowledges not only the owner's loss, but also reflects the worry and anxiety that can be caused through the uncertainty of the safety and wellbeing of a loved friend and member of the family.

But prevention is better than cure, which is why the recommendations that address the causes of pet theft are particularly welcome. It is essential that we target the activities of Organised Crime Groups, who we know are stealing pets to breed them illegally so that they can be sold to fund their criminal enterprises.

We will explore every avenue to get the best outcomes - from making changes to licensing arrangements, to improving the traceability of owners and encouraging cashless sales to make it more difficult for stolen pets to be sold on.

I would like to thank the Pet Theft Taskforce for such a comprehensive review of the issues and for providing us with a road map that will allow us to deal effectively with this terrible crime. Pets are valuable members of the family and we rely on their companionship, comfort and support. They ask little of us in return for their love and loyalty - other than to keep them safe and well. I am determined to do all I can to keep them safe and with their families, where they belong.

**The Right Honourable Robert Buckland QC MP**

**Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice**

## 2. Executive summary

Britain is a nation of pet lovers, and many pets are considered members of the family, with their welfare and safety a key concern for owners. When a pet is stolen, this can cause significant emotional distress to the owner and animal, and the government is committed to tackling this crime.

This report lays out the interventions that the government will be taking forward to tackle the issue of pet theft.

Since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic last year, many individuals and families have decided to buy or adopt a new pet into their homes and lives. Pets have provided their owners with an irrefutable level of emotional support during these difficult times.

With more people deciding to buy or adopt a pet, sales platforms have reported a considerable rise in puppy and kitten prices over the course of the past year. According to Dogs Trust, the price for 5 of the UK's most sought-after breeds grew significantly during the first lockdown with the price of some breeds rising by almost 90%. Google searches for 'buy a puppy' increased by over 160% in the months between March and August 2020 following the start of lockdown last year. A number of sources, including animal welfare charities and experts in the field, have hypothesised that price increases may have triggered a rise in pet thefts.

In response to these concerns, the government set up the Pet Theft Taskforce to gather evidence to understand the factors that may be contributing to a perceived or real rise in pet thefts and to recommend measures to tackle the problem.

The taskforce was led by the 3 Secretaries of State from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, and comprised from government officials from each department and representatives from operational partner organisations, who provided additional knowledge, experience and guidance on the practical aspects of reducing pet theft.

The membership of the Pet Theft Taskforce is listed in Annex A.

The taskforce was commissioned to:

- gather, research and commission work to build a clear evidence base on the scale of any issue
- consider the issue from end to end, including causes, prevention, reporting, enforcement and prosecution
- make clear and timely recommendations on ways to improve the situation around pet theft

Much of the current narrative is around dog theft, due to the higher number of dogs reported stolen compared to other pets. According to the Metropolitan Police Service, around 7 in 10 of crimes recorded in which animals are stolen involve dogs.



Whilst the taskforce has focused on dog theft it has also considered the wider position around all pet theft where possible.

The taskforce invited a number of key organisations and experts in the field to:

- present evidence on the level of pet theft and how it might have changed over time
- present evidence supporting an increase in the perception of the level of pet theft
- provide suggestions as to why any changes may have occurred

The experts and organisations who attended the meetings, alongside those whose correspondence was taken into consideration, are outlined in Annex B.

Taskforce members examined all proposed interventions brought to the attention of the taskforce, from both internal and external sources, and each intervention was carefully considered. The proposed interventions covered the issue of pet theft from end to end, and were divided into causes; prevention; reporting and data; enforcement; prosecution, and; sentencing.

Each intervention was assessed in relation to the practical deliverability of the intervention; the impact it would have on pet theft, and; the associated risks or unintended consequences. This report outlines the proposed interventions that the taskforce recommended be taken forward.

This report is part of the government's commitment to further strengthening the UK's position as a global leader in animal welfare. Defra recently published the [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#) which sets out the government's aims, ambitions and planned reforms across animal welfare.

Soon after the Action Plan was issued Defra introduced 2 landmark animal welfare Bills, the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill which will enhance protections for kept animals in Great Britain, and the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill which formally recognises that animals are sentient beings and will introduce mechanisms to provide assurance that all government policy decisions take account of this.

Further legislation is planned.

## Key findings

Estimates suggest that around 2,000 incidents of dog theft were reported to police forces across England and Wales in 2020 (unpublished data). In the context of an estimated population of 9.6 million dogs in the UK (figures from the [Peoples Dispensary for Sick Animals PAWS Report](#)), the risk of falling victim to dog theft is low.

An apparent relatively small increase in pet theft may be associated with an increase in demand. As demand for dogs has risen, so has their price. There has also been some evidence that as the value of stolen dogs has increased, in some areas this has attracted the interest of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs), who have adapted their criminality in response, taking advantage of the marketplace.

Whilst these figures might seem low, the emotional impact of having a pet stolen is undeniable, and often pets play a central role in their owners' lives, especially assistance dogs. The evidence presented to the taskforce has shown the serious impact of this crime on the victims. As well as causing trauma to the pet's owners, many cases of pet theft affect the animal's welfare.

Whilst it can be straightforward to recognise and provide evidence about the impact on an animal's physical wellbeing, it is often more difficult to identify and assess the psychological toll on companion animals of being taken from their primary carers.

A key conclusion from the taskforce is that reliable data on pet theft is limited. It is essential to address these data gaps as enhanced transparency is fundamental to supporting the police and the courts in dealing with this serious issue.

### 3. Recommendations

The taskforce has recommended the following interventions to the 3 Secretaries of State for Defra, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice.

#### New 'pet abduction' offence

There is growing public feeling that criminal law and the sentencing for offences involving the theft of pets do not sufficiently recognise an animal as something more than mere property. We are aware of the calls from some campaigners to recognise that animals are different from inanimate objects through the creation of a new criminal offence, or through a change to sentencing practice.

Those speaking before the taskforce gave impassioned evidence of the emotional value a pet provides them and their families. It is clear pets are valued as something more than just property. This is where many see the deficiencies with the current Theft Act 1968 ("Theft Act") – which treats pets as a type of property.

In May the government introduced into Parliament the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill which, if passed in its current form, explicitly recognises in UK law that animals as sentient beings. The bill also makes provision for an Animal Sentience Committee, which is able to issue reports on how government policy has paid due regard to the welfare of animals as sentient beings.

Reflecting this legal recognition of sentience, the Taskforce has considered ways to better reflect the view that stolen pets are not mere property but sentient beings, and considered a number of criminal law and sentencing interventions. The taskforce does not believe that the creation of a new pet theft offence or a statutory aggravating factor – in line with recent campaigns – would have the desired impact. This is because theft deals with the deprivation of property, and so the welfare of the stolen animal would not be a primary consideration when sentencing. However, a new 'pet abduction' offence could switch the focus from the loss to the owner to the welfare of the animal.

Any new legislation with an impact on sentencing will usually result in the independent Sentencing Council making an assessment as to whether their Sentencing Guidelines may require amendment as a result, or additional guidelines to be produced. Therefore, as and when any legislative changes are made, government officials stand ready to engage with the Sentencing Council to support any such assessment.

We recommend the development of legislative options at pace for a new 'pet abduction' offence to acknowledge the welfare of sentient animals. The policy development of the proposed new "pet abduction" offence has just begun and the details of the offence are to be determined. The scope of the offence should include dogs, and the applicability to other types of animal should be explored during the development of the policy.

## Identifying and tracking cases

Pet theft is not a specific crime in law nor classified as a specific crime type. Pet theft is currently included in the count of offences such as burglary, robbery and theft. Reliable data on 'pet theft' is limited and there is no centrally-held data on criminal justice system outcomes for 'pet theft' as it is not a separate identifiable offence.

The best available evidence comes from a number of police forces (from 33 of the 43 territorial forces in England and Wales) being able to extract data on pet thefts from their local record management systems and use that information in response to Freedom of Information requests. Currently, it is not possible to identify court outcomes for 'pet theft' without disproportionate cost.

The taskforce recognises that consistent recording and data collection of pet thefts by all police forces and by government across England and Wales would help identify pet theft cases and build a stronger evidence base of the scale of the problem. Having a robust identifier for 'pet theft' may subsequently allow cases to be tracked through the criminal justice system, from police recording to court prosecutions and sentencing outcomes.

We recommend exploring options which lead to improving consistent recording and data collection of pet thefts by all police forces across England and Wales and government across the entirety of the criminal justice system. This would help identify pet theft cases and to build a stronger evidence base of the scale of the problem, and of how cases are being dealt with by the criminal justice system.

## Enhancing the recording of keepership and of transfers

One of the key issues with the current microchipping regulations is the difficulty in navigating the number of databases that hold microchip records. At the time of writing there are 16 databases that are compliant with the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015 ('the 2015 dog Regulations').

There are also databases which are not compliant with the 2015 dog Regulations. Dogs whose records are held in a non-compliant database are considered not to be microchipped under the 2015 dog regulations.

It is a legal obligation for databases to make available data to other databases to determine which database holds the microchip numbers of which dogs. Evidence was presented to the taskforce which suggested that it is difficult for owners and enforcement agencies to navigate between different databases, making it difficult to flag and trace stolen dogs, due partially to the existence of non-compliant databases.

Defra is already reviewing The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015. This includes reviewing the operation of the current microchip database systems, with a view to introducing improvements where required. The recommendations from the taskforce will be considered by this review, which also involves the preparation of legislation to introduce compulsory cat microchipping.

A key intervention considered by the taskforce was exploring a single point of access for all databases. A single point of access to the microchipping databases that is accessible to vets, the police and local authorities, could make information from all database providers more readily accessible, and could enable missing or stolen pets to be flagged up more clearly.

The taskforce also considered more robust rules for notifying transfers of dogs to new keepers. This could include whether, and if so how, processes around notification of keepership change should apply to both old and new keepers; rules on timeliness for notifying such changes; improved keeper education about the existing legal obligations in relation to notifying a database of changes to keepership details, and; consideration of how this should apply to breeders.

A further proposed intervention was the compulsory scanning of microchips by vets at first consultation to enable the identification of stolen dogs or cats so that they can be reunited with their rightful owner. Questions on compulsory microchip scanning of dogs and cats formed part of a [public consultation on cat microchipping](#) that Defra carried out earlier this year. Defra is considering the responses and will put forward proposals this autumn.

The taskforce also considered requiring breeders and/or keepers to submit additional information to the databases on the birth dates of litters and on the microchip details for both the litter and their mother, in order to link mothers to puppies. This would improve traceability and assist local authorities to monitor how many litters one dog has had.

We recommend introducing new requirements to register more details on dog microchip databases, as well as taking forward other improvements to how the databases work, including exploring a single point of access and enabling changes of keeper to be tracked more closely.

## Tackling the fear of crime

There is a high level of perceived fear around pet theft and some people have expressed views that the police could be doing more. Since the beginning of the taskforce police forces have demonstrated they are taking significant actions to address the issue of pet theft.

### **Actions that the police are taking include:**

All forces have been asked to ensure that if a crime involving a dog (or other pet) is committed, the property field on the crime recording system is updated to include the stolen pet, along with as many details known about the animal as possible. This could include microchip numbers, DNA references and photographs. This will then allow all forces to search the stolen property field to allow a more accurate picture of the problem moving forward, and will also increase the prospect of forces reuniting recovered dogs with their owners.

Devon and Cornwall Police have launched a dog theft working group. The first meeting was well attended by over 20 forces from across England and Wales. All

forces taking part in this working group have now been able to provide details of a single point of contact for (SPOC) pet theft to Devon and Cornwall Police. This will allow an improved national response and better co-ordination.

Police forces across England and Wales will ensure the media and members of the public receive consistent communications on the issue of pet theft, including advice on the steps owners can take to help protect their pets.

Intelligence suggests that a significant proportion of dog theft is carried out by Organised Crime Groups (OGCs). Forces have been asked to respond effectively to intelligence around illegal breeding and take positive action wherever possible. Intelligence relating to OCG and illegal breeding will be fed into [Operation OPAL](#) in order to develop an improved National intelligence picture.

Improvements are being considered in the way in which dogs are registered and identified, to give police a greater chance of reuniting dogs with their owners. There are currently several proposals which will help reassure the public. This includes examining the option of an arrangement whereby owners could register their dog with the police and in so doing include owners' details, microchip number, photograph, DNA reference, and Ultra Violet marking reference. This information would be held separately by police forces and would sit alongside the existing microchip databases.

The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners are exploring the associated crimes of blackmail and fraud as there have been a few recorded instances of these crimes linked pet theft. When a pet is stolen, a criminal may blackmail the owner for reward money, and in some cases they may not even have the pet in their keepership but are taking advantage of the owner's loss for their own gain. This year Gloucestershire police will run an anonymous survey to discover the prevalence of these connected crimes, which will feed into future police action.

We recommend that police operational partners continue their work to tackle the issue of pet theft and that operational partners and government Departments' work together to increase publicity about police successes in tackling pet theft, and about police activity to tackle pet theft, including their joint working with partner agencies such as the RSPCA and local authorities.

## Further recommendations

The taskforce has also recommended taking forward these further actions and ongoing work to tackle specific aspects of the issue of pet theft.

### **Improving the traceability of online sales**

A key issue raised in the taskforce was the difficulty in tracing sellers. Often illegitimate sellers can remain anonymous by using online platforms to place adverts, and in this way, stolen dogs can be sold to unsuspecting buyers.

To improve the traceability of sellers the taskforce discussed ensuring proof of ID is a requirement for everyone placing an online pet advert.

This could be taken forward by introducing a voluntary code of practice and certification scheme for compliant sites, in order to promote and encourage websites to take forward their own initiatives to heighten checks on sellers and on the screening of adverts. The taskforce also discussed that websites should encourage the use of cashless sales between vendors and sellers. Whilst payments may take place off site, encouraging buyers to avoid cash sales will further improve traceability, and help protect buyers from accidentally purchasing stolen dogs.

Defra endorses the work of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG), an advisory group made up of animal welfare organisations, trade associations and veterinary bodies, who engage with online marketplaces in the UK to help them distinguish appropriate adverts from those that should be removed. Defra will work with PAAG to support their ongoing good work and ensure that pet theft is a core consideration for improvements to sales platforms.

We recommend encouraging sales platforms to implement more identity checks on sellers to improve the traceability of sellers, and to encourage the use of cashless transactions.

### **Providing more assurance about where puppies come from**

The government has already taken significant steps to address the supply of low welfare dogs to the marketplace, and this is particularly relevant in cases where dogs are stolen so that they can be used for breeding.

Under The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 anyone who is in the business of selling animals as pets, of breeding and selling dogs commercially, or who breeds three or more litters a year needs a valid licence from their local authority. Licence holders must meet strict statutory minimum welfare standards which are enforced by local authorities who have powers to issue, refuse or revoke licences.

Any licence holder advertising animals for sale will need to include their licence number in the advert and specify which local authority issued the licence. Additional requirements placed on advertisements include that the age of the animal for sale must be displayed along with a recognisable photograph.

Since 6 April 2020, in line with the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (as amended by the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2019, otherwise known as Lucy's Law), pet shops, pet dealers and other commercial pet sellers have been prevented from selling puppies and kittens in England that they have not bred themselves.

This ban aims to address welfare concerns associated with puppies and kittens bought and sold by third parties. Sellers must now only offer dogs which they have bred themselves and breeders should show the animal with its mother and in its home environment to prospective purchasers. Parallel prohibitions on the commercial third party sale of puppies and kittens will come into force in Scotland and in Wales during 2021, and are being taken forward in Northern Ireland. Having alignment across the UK will improve transparency of the sale of pets bred

domestically, thereby further restricting the ability for low welfare suppliers to operate, including those who might look to breed from stolen dogs.

A review of the current regulations is due in 2023, and this provides an opportunity to consider how these regulations are contributing to tackling pet theft, and what further changes might be made. This would include considering the case for introducing a light touch registration scheme for breeders who produce less than three litters per year and currently fall outside the scope of the licensing scheme. Such a registration scheme may help support the traceability of more puppies which are placed on the market. The taskforce also discussed exploring encouraging cashless sales as part of this review, again to improve the traceability of sellers.

We recommend issuing a call for evidence on introducing a new registration requirement for those involved in low levels of breeding which fall below the current breeding licensing threshold, as part of improving the traceability of all sales. This would complement existing commitments to introduce licensing for rescue and rehoming centres, and complement existing proposals to clamp down on imports of concern through the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill currently before Parliament.

### **Supporting pilots of complementary methods identifying pets**

Evidence was heard by the taskforce that some owners are concerned that microchipping is not sufficient for tracking stolen pets and there was some discussion of instances where microchips have been cut out of stolen pets. However, this specific crime has not been widely reported and evidence does not indicate that this is a widespread issue.

Some police forces have decided to trial alternative identification methods due to difficulties identifying owners using microchips and photographs. Solutions are currently being piloted offering owners a complementary service to microchipping, in the form of voluntary DNA and forensic marking of pets. Police forces are running Dog DNA pilots whereby dog owner pays for a DNA kit, to swab their dog and store the dog's DNA on a database. Police can then take DNA from recovered dogs, to try to identify the owner. Forensic marking pilots are also being conducted to assess the option of UV marking of dogs, in a similar way to how property is currently marked.

The additional costs incurred from pursuing a DNA based solution are one of the factors the police will consider in deciding its approach going forward. The adoption of new techniques that may speed up the return of stolen dogs to their rightful keepers may also potentially reduce kennelling costs. Further rollout would require an impact assessment.

Any new ID solutions would need to be complementary and additional to the existing, established system of microchipping. While DNA tests can be useful, taking swabs requires technical expertise and the sample needs to be sent away for laboratory analysis. Microchips on the other hand can be read easily and the associated keeper details can be accessed immediately. In addition, the costs for both pet owners and enforcement authorities are currently significantly higher for DNA identification than for microchip identification, and we already have an established infrastructure based on microchips, which includes international acceptance of their use on travel documents.



We recommend supporting the pilots of some police forces who are trialling new voluntary forms of ID, such as DNA databases and forensic marking to work alongside microchipping.

## 4. Background

### Wider animal welfare work

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on pet theft and on wider issues around companion animal welfare. In addition to the work of the Pet Theft Taskforce, Defra is already tackling wider animal welfare issues which have a bearing on pet theft.

In particular, Defra introduced 2 landmark Bills this year. The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill will enhance protections for kept animals in Great Britain, and the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill will introduce mechanisms to provide assurance that all government policy decisions take account of the welfare of sentient animals.

These Bills build on the launch of the Action Plan for Animal Welfare this year, which sets out the government's aims, ambitions and planned reforms across animal welfare, as part of its work to build on our status as a world leader on animal welfare.

Microchipping became mandatory for dogs in 2015, and over 90% of dogs are currently microchipped (Defra's quarterly statistics July 2020). Defra is currently reviewing the 'Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015' including the operation of the current microchip database systems, with a view to introducing improvements. The government has also committed to introducing mandatory cat microchipping, which will help ensure cats can be reunited with their owners as quickly as possible.

The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill includes measures to end the abhorrent, cruel practice of puppy smuggling and low-welfare pet imports. Defra has been working closely with the Devolved Administrations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide protection for animals brought in by unscrupulous traders, and to prevent undesirable imports as much as we can.

Defra also maintains an ongoing public media campaign, Petfished, which shows the public how to avoid purchasing low-welfare and illegally-supplied pets. This includes providing clear signposting to where responsible breeders and rehoming centres can be found, and encouraging prospective buyers to research the seller thoroughly before they visit and decide to purchase. The campaign provides a list of red flags for buyers to look out for when searching for a pet online.

Currently, breeders who sell more than three litters a year are required to be licensed. Following the recent introduction of a wide range of improvements to the local authority licensing of pet sales and pet breeding, including the introduction of 'Lucy's Law' which bans third party sales, the government also committed to introducing licensing for rescue and rehoming centres including to help ensure that unscrupulous sellers are not masquerading as rescue centres.

Unlicensed commercial dog breeding, especially by producers who ought to be licensed (breeders who sell more than three litters a year), remains a priority concern due to the high rewards available to criminal breeders. This issue is being addressed at national level through a Dog Theft and Illegal Breeding Strategic Working Group.

This group is led by the Welsh government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) co-ordinator in the South Wales Regional Organised Crime Unit and comprises members of the police (with links to the police's national organised acquisitive crime intelligence unit (OPAL)), Trading Standards, HM Treasury, Defra, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, and non-government organisations along with others.

The group is primarily an intelligence sharing forum whose objectives include identifying key threats and ensuring that any operational response is in line with the strategic approach in the Serious and Organised Crime Strategy.

## Current Criminal Justice System

### Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime

The police's 'recorded crime collection' is an offence-based recording system in which the primary purpose is to record the number of criminal offences reported to the police by crime type in accordance with the [Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime \(HOCR\)](#).

If the sequence of crimes in an incident, or a complex crime, involving the same offender and victim contains more than one type of crime, HOCR requires the police to record the most serious crime (the 'Principal Crime Rule'). In determining the most serious crime, the most violent crime will generally take precedence over the most serious property crime. If it is not possible to do this, regard must be taken of the maximum penalty or, where equal penalties are prescribed, the maximum sentence likely to be imposed on an offender. There are very few exceptions to the Principal Crime Rule - for example stalking, harassment or controlling and coercive behaviour should be recorded in addition to the most serious additional notifiable crime reported at the same time.

Pet theft is not a specific crime in law or classified as a specific crime type in the HOCR. However, pet theft is a notifiable crime in that the underlying causal crime (for example burglary) will of itself be notifiable. Crimes reported to the police are treated as either notifiable or non-notifiable offences. Notifiable offences must be notified to the Home Office for inclusion in the main count of police recorded crime (which eventually end up being published as part of quarterly crime statistics).

To be deemed notifiable, the offence must be one that is indictable and must, or could, be heard at Crown Court, or (with Home Secretary approval) one of a few closely-related summary only offences (heard only in Magistrates' Courts), such as assault without injury.

Depending on the circumstances in which the pet is stolen, 'pet thefts' will be included in the count of offences such as burglary, robbery and theft notified to the Home Office. For example, a dog might be stolen:

- while walking off the lead in a park (recorded as theft)
- from inside a car (recorded as theft from vehicle)

- as part of a break-in to a home (recorded as burglary)
- with force whilst being walked on a lead (recorded as robbery)

While police forces are not required to provide specific data about the theft of pets to the Home Office, they may identify these crimes within their local management information systems to build intelligence about crime in their respective force areas.

33 of the 43 territorial forces in England and Wales have been able to extract information on dog thefts from their local record management systems in response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

### **Prosecution and sentencing**

The penalty for theft of a pet is currently covered by s7 Theft Act 1968 (“Theft Act”), which provides that it is an offence punishable by a maximum of seven years’ imprisonment to dishonestly appropriate property, belonging to another, with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it.

Throughout the taskforce we have heard evidence that the taking of pets may not necessarily be carried out under the guise of theft alone, but that pets may be taken from the home (burglary, s9 Theft Act) or through use of a force, taken from another (robbery, s8 Theft Act). Further offences could be made if handling stolen goods (s22 Theft Act).

The maximum penalty available for theft is up to 7 years imprisonment. For handling stolen goods and burglary it is up to 14 years (in the case of a building or part of a building which is a dwelling, otherwise it is up to 10 years), and for robbery the maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

There is an intricate picture of criminality centred around pets – with some anecdotal information suggesting that dog theft may be part of the wider organised crime landscape, and may contribute to a wider patchwork of crime transcending UK and international borders. At the heart of all this is the impact any theft has on the welfare of the animal and its owner. Too often a pet is taken from a cherished, loving home, and the pet may suffer including in terms of emotional trauma.

It is already a criminal offence to cause any animal unnecessary suffering under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Where there is evidence of unnecessary suffering, the offender may be charged with an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 in addition to any theft offences. Most recently the maximum penalty for animal cruelty and for fighting offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 has increased to five years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine (through the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021).

While Parliament is responsible for the sentencing framework and for setting maximum penalties, individual sentencing decisions are a matter for our independent courts. When deciding what sentence to impose, courts must consider the circumstances of the case, including the culpability of the offender, the harm they caused or intended to cause, and any aggravating and mitigating factors. The courts also have a statutory duty to follow any relevant sentencing guidelines, issued by the

independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales. The primary function of the Sentencing Council is to promote greater transparency and consistency in sentencing, while maintaining the independence of the judiciary.

The Sentencing Council's guidelines on theft lists relevant factors that are typically likely to be present in many cases of pet theft. For example, when assessing the harm caused by a theft, the court is required to consider, in addition to any financial loss, the emotional distress caused to the victim and the loss of items that are of high value to the owner, regardless of monetary worth. Such factors could apply in cases of pet theft and would be taken into account by the sentencer to attract a higher sentence.

Similarly, the Sentencing Council has issued guidance on sentencing for a number of animal cruelty offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Death or serious injury/harm to the animal, or a high level of suffering are primary factors in the sentencing decisions for such cases, and the presence of these factors can merit higher sentences.

## 4. Evidence

This section reviews the available data on the volume and trends in pet thefts noting that the evidence base is limited with significant gaps and that data quality considerations apply.

### Main findings

- around 7 in 10 of crimes recorded by police in which animals are stolen involve dogs (Stolen animals dashboard, Metropolitan Police)
- around 2,000 dog theft crimes may be reported to police each year in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>
- ‘dog theft’ is estimated to be a low volume crime, accounting for fewer than half of one percent of all theft offences<sup>2</sup>, however public perception is that it is high
- there was a reported 3.5% increase in recorded cases of dog theft between 2019 and 2020<sup>3</sup>, and this was despite a 26% decrease in police recorded theft offences overall during the same time period<sup>4 5</sup>
- public perception and the emotional impact on victims can be high, as also indicated by local pet theft related surveys

### Main sources of evidence

The main sources of evidence and statistics on crime we can use to estimate the prevalence of pet theft cases are:

#### **Data held centrally within government to measure crime in England and Wales**

This includes aggregated responses to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), a representative survey of the general population’s experiences of crime, held by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and Home Office’s Police Recorded Crime data; a count of notifiable crimes reported to and recorded by police. Neither source has a unique identifier for pet theft, so offences are recorded within other categories and cannot be separately identified.

The CSEW is considered a better guide to trends on crime and victimisation within England and Wales since it includes crimes that have been reported to the police as

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<sup>1</sup> Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (2021) [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (2021) [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2020.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Trends in theft offences are largely driven by offences such as theft from shops, which may have been impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown.

well as those that haven't and is unaffected by changes in the propensity of victims to report to the police. Care should be taken when interpreting police recorded crime trends due to changes and improvements to recording processes. Similarly, the CSEW sample is not large enough to produce reliable estimates for crimes that have relatively low levels of incidence or prevalence, nor does it ask about theft of a pet specifically. For this reason, we have been unable to use data from the CSEW to assess changes in pet theft.

### **Evidence not held centrally within government**

This includes responses to FOI data requests to police forces, academic research, or data collected directly from third parties and external stakeholders

As there is no centrally held data on pet theft, most of the evidence presented in this paper on pet theft is based on incomplete evidence collected by third parties or the private sector (not centrally within the government), and in particular, the police recorded crime series. As a result, a number of data limitations arise and particular care must be taken when making conclusions about representation across the jurisdiction (or across different jurisdictions), and how data may be collected. A summary of the data limitations is provided at the end of this section.

### **How prevalent is pet theft?**

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) routinely extracts information on pet theft from its record management system and publishes a [stolen animals dashboard](#). While figures for the MPS may not be representative of all of England and Wales, this data suggests around seven in ten of crimes recorded in which animals are stolen involve dogs. The next most commonly involved animals were birds, fish and cats.

Academics recently developed a paper on dog theft evidence and requested data from police forces using FOI requests ([Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#)). Based on responses from 33 of the 43 territorial forces in England and Wales, they found a total of 1,452 offences of dog theft in 2019 and 1,504 offences in 2020, where details from police forces across both years were available.

Assuming those forces that were unable to respond recorded the same average number of thefts reported by those who did, we estimate around 2,000 dog theft crimes may be reported to police each year in England and Wales.

### **Within the context of pet ownership**

According to [Peoples Dispensary for Sick Animals findings about pet ownership](#), there are an estimated 9.6 million pet dogs, 10.7 million pet cats and 900,000 pet rabbits in the UK. Based on the previously mentioned 2,000 dog theft crimes each year in England and Wales, the risk to dog owners is low.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (2021) [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

As dog theft is by far the most common type of pet theft, the risk is lower for owners of other types of pets ([Stolen animals dashboard](#), Metropolitan Police). In the context of overall crime, where 1.5 million thefts were recorded by the police in England and Wales in 2020 <sup>7</sup> 'dog theft' is low volume. Nevertheless, as evidenced by representations made to the Task Force, the emotional impact of pet theft on victims is traumatic.

## What recent trends show

The analysis presented by Dr Helen Selby-Fell (The Open University) and Dr Daniel Allen (Keele University) suggests that there was an upward trend in "dog theft" between 2015 and 2017 <sup>8</sup>, using data provided to them by police forces under FOI requests <sup>9</sup>.

[Police FOI dog theft data was also provided as evidence to the Petitions Committee](#), covering the years 2015 to 2020.

The paper reports that the number of dog thefts recorded by 33 police forces who responded rose from 1,559 in 2015 to 1,909 in 2017, a rise of 350 incidents. This trend is mirrored by all theft offences, which rose by 7% between 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017.

The volume of reported dog theft incidents then fell in 2019 to 1,452 incidents, before rising by 3.5% in 2020 (COVID-19 lockdown year) to 1,504 offences; a similar level to that recorded in earlier years.

**Figure 1: The table and chart show the number of dog theft crimes recorded by police forces for England and Wales 2015 to 2020 (based on records collected through FOI submissions and requests)**

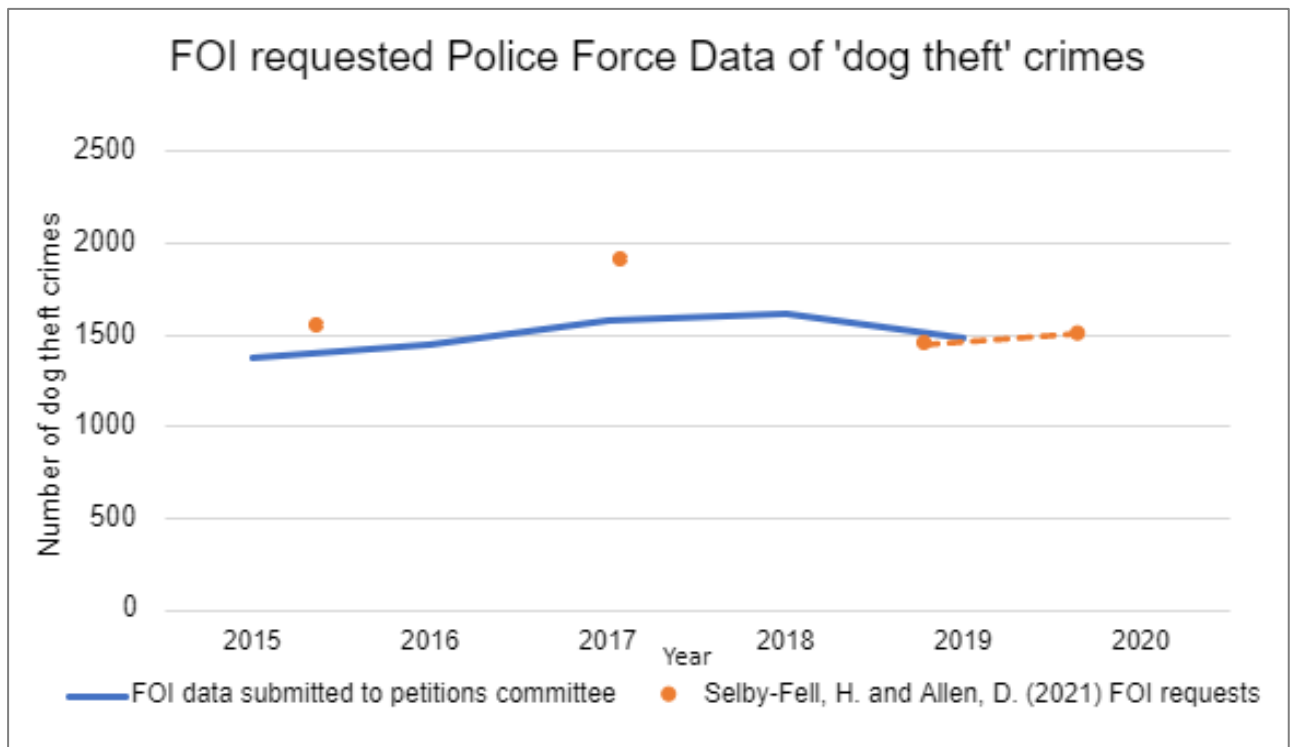
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>FOI data submitted to petitions committee (number of dog thefts)</b>	1378	1450	1575	1619	1484	n/a
<b>FOI requests submitted by Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (number of dog thefts)</b>	1559	n/a	1909	n/a	1452	1504

<sup>7</sup> Table A4: Police recorded crime by offence, year ending March 2003 to year ending December 2020 and percentage change between year ending December 2019 and year ending December 2020, Appendix tables; Crime Survey for England and Wales. Office for National Statistics.

<sup>8</sup> It is possible some of this increase is a result of improvements to reporting and recording.

<sup>9</sup> Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (2021) [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).





Source: Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (2021) [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

The rise in reported dog theft incidents in 2020 is in contrast to the 26% decrease in total theft offences in the police recorded crime series from 1.97 million incidents in 2019 to 1.46 million incidents in 2020. This decrease was partly driven by a 29% fall in shoplifting, with many shops being closed during the pandemic. Source: [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2020](#)).

Falls in theft offences were driven by the impact of public health restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the most common theft offence typically prosecuted is 'Theft from Shops'.

DogLost, a national online community of dog owners and volunteers that helps reunite lost dogs with their owners, reported an increase from 172 stolen dogs in 2019, to 465 reported in 2020<sup>10</sup>. This dataset includes data collected by DogLost, where there has been a crime reference number (CRN) and this increase may be due, in part, to the increasingly pro-active approach that the organisation has adopted working with victims and police forces, as well as the increased media coverage of the issue and public awareness of the website<sup>11</sup>.

There are also indications that reported cat theft has been increasing. For example, responses to FOI requests made to UK police forces showed that recorded cat theft

<sup>10</sup> Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (2021) [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

<sup>11</sup> Selby-Fell, H. and Allen, D. (2021) [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

crime, in the forces that responded, increased from 150 recorded cat thefts in 2015 to 441 cat thefts in 2020. Source: [Cat theft report 2021](#).

## Are there geographical differences in the rate of pet theft?

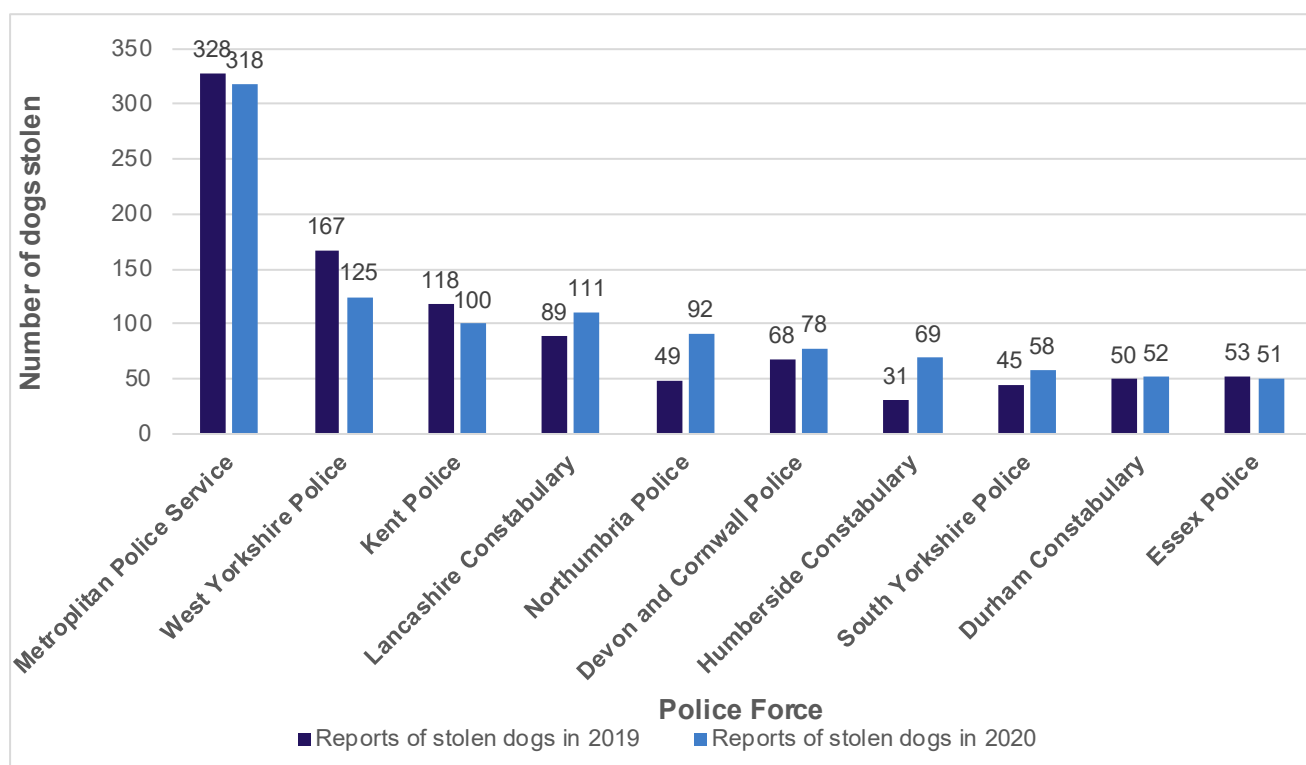
There are variations between police forces recording increases or decreases in dog theft offences. It is noted by Dr Allen and Dr Selby-Fell, “One police force saw a large increase against their 5-year average (74% increase), and whilst others saw large decreases against their five-year average (for example, 61% decrease). The 2020 data also suggests regional variations in police force areas reporting multiple dogs being stolen (for example, 4 police forces in particular had higher rates of multiple dogs stolen)”. Source: [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

Care must be taken when comparing forces to ensure that forces collect and report data consistently over time or across geographical areas.

According to research by Direct Line, The North West, the North East, London and the South East together accounted for over half (52%) of all reported dog thefts in 2020. There was a 68% rise in dog thefts in the North West, and 54% in North East.

The Metropolitan Police Service remained the force with the highest number of reported dog thefts, having received 318 reports last year. West Yorkshire Police and Kent Police followed. Despite this, all 3 of these forces saw a decrease in the number of dogs reported stolen in 2020 compared to 2019. Source [Direct Line Group: Dog theft increases by 19 per cent during lockdown](#).

**Figure 2: Top 10 police forces by number of dogs stolen in 2020**



Source: [Dog theft increases by 19 per cent during lockdown - Direct Line Group](#).

According to Direct Line Group, in contrast South Wales Police received just 6 reports of stolen dogs in 2020, a 57% fall compared to 2019 (where approximately 14 cases were recorded). In 2020, Surrey Police had 12 reports, while both Avon and Somerset Constabulary and Lincolnshire Police just 13 each.

On cat theft, the Metropolitan Police Service recorded almost a third of the total 428 cat thefts recorded in 2020 (133 thefts). Source: [Cat theft report 2021](#).

## What is behind the recent trends?

There has been speculation in the media that higher demand for pets during the pandemic has fuelled the rise particularly in dog theft. As demand for dogs has risen, so has the price of purchasing such animals. Although pet prices have increased in the last year and so have the number of pet theft incidents, this does not necessarily mean this is a causal relationship. More complete data and further analysis would be necessary to understand this relationship.

Pets4Home reported the average price paid for a puppy in 2020 was £1,875, which was up from £810 in 2019 (for data from January to November of each year).

Source: [Pets4Homes \(2020\) The Impact of COVID-19 on the Pet Landscape](#).

[Dogs Trust reported English Bulldogs were the most expensive breed](#), being advertised for £2,140 in June 2020 compared to £1,637 in March of the same year – and some listings were as high as £9,000.

There has also been a suggestion that as the value of stolen dogs has increased it has attracted the interest of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs). It has been estimated by Welsh Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) that between 10 to 15% of current OCGs in Wales are involved in dog theft or illegal dog breeding, with these crimes linked ([Tarian Regional Organised Crime Unit](#)).

DogLost have also reported an increase in cases of ‘mass thefts’ where multiple dogs were stolen as part of the same incident. Without further evidence, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which such offences are ‘targeted’ (and perhaps linked to organised criminality). Source: [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

In the majority of cases, dogs were stolen from homes, mostly from gardens and outbuildings. Source: [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

In over 50% of dog thefts, dogs were stolen from a home or garden<sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> This is down from 2017 where it was reported that 70% of dog thefts were from a home or garden, and may indicate changing methods – see [Dogs Trust: Family Pawtrait Flyer](#). There

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<sup>12</sup> It is our understanding that a proportion of pet thefts are a result of domestic breakups. This could potentially skew information on where pets are stolen from.

<sup>13</sup> Dogs Trust, 2021 (unpublished).

have also been [incidents of dogs being stolen from breeders, as reported by the BBC](#).

## Public perceptions

There is some evidence to show that there is increasing public concern about pet theft. This may be linked to increased media coverage of the issue. A [dog theft survey conducted by the Police and Crime Commissioner \(PCC\) of Sussex in partnership with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners \(AoPC\)](#), indicated that, while 0.34% of respondents said they had a dog stolen, 97% of respondents believed dog theft was a serious problem, 94% said they'd seen reports of dog theft or any suspicious activity in relation to dog thefts on social media, 66% said they have become more fearful of taking their dog for a walk in the day and 62% said they were more fearful at night.

While this survey had a self-selecting sample and was not necessarily representative of the whole population, it was large and had nearly 125,000 respondents from across all police force areas in England and Wales.

Similarly, a [dog owner survey by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation \(BASC\)](#), with a sample of 3,409 dog owners, suggests 75% of respondents have taken additional actions to protect their dogs from theft over the last 12 months. This includes varying the times and places they dog walk (60%), reducing posting on social media (49%), and having added security lighting (41%) or cameras (36%). As there is a perceived increase in pet theft over the last year, the majority of pet owners are taking precautions to prevent their pet from being stolen. It is possible that these actions and better reporting of pet theft, could be driving trends in the data.

The Dogs Trust reports that in the first few months of 2021 visits to their 'dog theft' page increased by 780% compared to the same period in 2020. See [Roadmap for rovers: Helping dogs cope and stay safe in larger social settings](#).

## Outcomes of pet theft reports

We have been unable to access data on the outcomes of pet thefts. There is no centrally-held court outcomes data on theft, burglary and/or robbery offences involving pets, as it is not a separate identifiable offence or aggravating factor that may be recorded by the courts or throughout the Criminal Justice System.

We can however assume that it would be a subset of the number of reported incidents. Data on court proceedings and outcomes would need to be subject to robust data collection, from upstream drivers (such as at charge, or CRN), with a unique identifier (such as a 'flag' for a pet theft case within pre-existing theft, burglary or robbery offences).

However, police data from FOI requests in 2020 shows less than 1% of recorded cases of dog theft resulted in a charge, with previous studies suggesting charge

rates are below 5%, for example [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

In 2020, 13 cases where details of cat theft was recorded by police reached the courts. However, this was almost entirely attributable to one police force, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and could be due to MPS' reporting techniques. There were a further 9 police cautions for cat theft in 2020. See [Cat theft report 2021](#).

The proportion of dogs returned to their owners remained the same overall in 2020 compared to 2019, with just over a fifth (22%) of dogs reunited with their owners. The force which saw the greatest success for returning stolen dogs to their owners in 2020 was Warwickshire, reuniting 17 out of 23 stolen dogs (87%) with their families. See [Direct Line Group: Dog theft increases by 19 per cent during lockdown](#).

## Conclusion

From FOI data made available by police forces, it appears the number of pet theft incidents reported to police was stable between 2019 and 2020, remaining at an estimated 2,000 incidents reported to the police each year. This is despite a large (26%) decrease in theft offences overall which may have been impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns.

Trends may be driven by a sudden change in offences that are usually high volume, such as theft from shops, which were impacted by COVID-19 lockdown. However, the FOI data is not complete, and is influenced by victim reporting and potential improvements to police recording practices and IT/data systems over time. The widely reported big percentage differences, whilst not inaccurate per se, are misleading as based on small numbers and few areas.

Changes in small numbers can suggest big impacts and often selective figures are reported in the media. For example, it has been widely reported that there has been a 250% increase in police recorded dog theft (for example Sky News, 2020; The Daily Mirror, 2021; Euronews, 2020; BBC, 2021). It appears that this figure was taken from only one police force area (with small annual volumes of offences) and was a comparison of two 7-month periods (January to July 2019, against the same period in 2020). Source: [Dog Theft: What can we infer from the evidence so far?](#).

## Data limitations

Although the below list is not exhaustive of the limitations with the data, it provides a high-level summary. The above results should be interpreted with these caveats in mind.

### **Lack of a centrally held database**

As pet theft is not a separate theft offence, there is currently no centrally held database with an identifier for 'pet theft' that records incidents of pet theft across forces and the outcome of the reporting. Therefore, data collected has been shared

with us by external stakeholders. Due to a lack of a centrally held database, we have been unable to verify the data shared by third parties. Although some stakeholders have been able to share Crime Reference Numbers, the lack of a centrally held database means we are unable to determine the outcomes of these reports.

### **Incomplete information**

The majority of data collected on pet theft is sourced from responses to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to local police forces who can record details about items stolen within the non-mandatory property field or free text boxes in their force record management systems. However, in all reports we are aware that not all forces responded. This may be due to forces not being able to easily retrieve data from their systems without disproportionate cost. This means the recorded data is incomplete and not necessarily nationally representative. In addition, providing information in free text fields can pose challenges in terms of getting individuals to record details in a consistent way

### **Pet theft versus lost pets**

If an individual reports their pet as stolen (when it may have simply been lost or injured by a motorist) the police will tend to initially record it as a crime and issue a CRN. If subsequently it comes to light that the pet was not stolen the crime will, subject to resource constraints, be cancelled if the police are informed.

### **Methods of recording**

Depending on the nature of the crime, pet thefts can be recorded under a range of different offences including burglary, robbery, or other theft. As such, it is dispersed within the police recorded crime series and while some forces have set up systems to separately identify and count it, others have not. This makes it difficult to compare trends over time or between forces for geographical insight.

### **Recording inconsistency**

A higher number of recorded cases of pet theft does not necessarily mean the force has a higher number of pet theft incidents. More recorded cases may be reflective of forces' recording practices, more victims reporting incidents, or due to a genuinely higher number of incidents.

### **Recording of crime**

The figures presented represent recorded crime figures based on victims having reported to the police. It will therefore not include all incidents of pet theft.

### **Undercount of total number of animals stolen**

The police recorded crime series is a victim-based recording system. This means that if a victim reports to the police then one crime will be recorded for each separate incident irrespective of how many pets have been stolen. For reference, between January and June 2021, nearly 600 animals were [recorded as stolen on the MPS dashboard](#), but this made up only just over 300 distinct crime records.

## 5. Next steps

The government has considered the evidence and recommendations put forward by the Pet Theft Taskforce and will be taking forward action on each of the proposed key interventions outlined in this report to tackle the issue of pet theft from end to end.

In 2021 the government will develop a new 'Pet Abduction' offence and explore appropriate primary legislative vehicles to take forward this new offence. The details of this new offence will be subject to further consideration.

In 2021 Defra will also take forward the recommendations on microchipping from this report under the review of the 'The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015'. Defra will explore; new requirements to register more details on dog microchip databases; a single point of access, and enabling changes of keeper to be tracked more closely.

The Home Office will work with the police to explore options for ensuring pet thefts are recorded in a consistent manner and readily identifiable within police force information management systems across England and Wales. Cross government leads will also explore the feasibility of options to improve data collected on pet theft cases throughout the Criminal Justice System, informed by the work the Home Office takes forward.

We commend the continued efforts of police forces to tackle the issue of pet theft and will continue to support and publicise ongoing police successes in this area.

Whilst current evidence indicates the risk of falling victim to dog theft is low, and owners should feel confident to enjoy their pets, the emotional impact of having a pet stolen is undeniable. The actions taken forward from the Pet Theft Taskforce will ensure that the issue of pet theft is tackled end from end, and that the welfare and safety of pets is fully taken into account.

## Annex A: membership of group

Companion Animal Welfare and Sentience Team, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Public Safety Group, Crime Reduction Directorate, Home Office.

Non Violent Offences Policy Team, Criminal Law Policy, Ministry of Justice.

Deputy Chief Constable Amanda Blakeman, Heddlu Gwent Police.

David Trew, Detective Sergeant 1516 Staff Officer to: Deputy Chief Constable Amanda Blakeman, Heddlu Gwent Police.

Thomas Smith, National Operational HQ (Nat Ops HQ), Border Force, Home Office.

Katy Bourne OBE, Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner.

Chris Nelson, Police and Crime Commissioner Gloucestershire.

Detective Superintendent Neil Austin, Strategic Advisor for Serious Organised Acquisitive Crime and Lead for Opal.

Frances Janusz, Crown Prosecution Service.

Rob Quest, Chair of Local Government Animal Welfare Group.



## Annex B: external organisations that gave evidence

Paula Boyden BVetMed MRCVS, Dogs Trust.

Dr Daniel Allen, Keele University.

Dr Helen Selby-Fell, The Open University.

Heidi Allen, RSPCA.

Wayne May, Dog Lost.

Dr Edward Hayes, The Kennel Club.

Alicia Oke, Petlog, The Kennel Club.

Eric Kendall, South Wales Police, GAIN Coordinator and Chair of Dog Theft/ Illegal Dog Breeding – Strategic Working Group.

Steve Wade, The Sentencing Council.

Mandy Banks, The Sentencing Council.

Amber Isaac, The Sentencing Council.

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