

Cat microchipping consultation launched

Compulsory microchipping for cats could be introduced as early as next year, helping to reunite thousands of cat owners with lost or stolen pets.

An eight-week [public consultation](#) on the proposal to make it mandatory for pet owners to microchip their cats has launched today (23 December) and will seek views from vets, owners and members of the public as part of a renewed effort to further raise the UK's world-leading animal welfare standards. An earlier [call for evidence](#) showed 99% support for microchipping.

It is estimated that over a quarter of the UK's pet cats aren't microchipped, meaning that [up to 2.6 million cats will benefit from the new measures](#).

The process of microchipping involves the painless insertion of a chip, generally around the size of a grain of rice, under the skin of a pet. The microchip has a unique serial number which can be read by a scanner. When an animal strays or is lost, scanning the microchip means the registered owner can be identified on a database and the pet can quickly be reunited with them.

Since compulsory dog microchipping was introduced in 2016, around nine million dogs are now microchipped, meaning that thousands of displaced dogs have been reunited with their owners more quickly, reducing the time they spend in rehoming kennels and reducing owner and animal distress.

Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

It is hugely important that cats and kittens are microchipped as this is often the only hope owners have of seeing their lost cat returned safely to their home.

These plans to make cat microchipping compulsory build on our actions to improve our already world leading animal welfare standards, including taking steps to end live animal exports and ban the practice of keeping primates as pets.

UK Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

Microchipping is a very important part of cat ownership. As we have seen already with dogs, compulsory microchipping is crucial in helping reunite owners with their treasured pets if they are lost or stolen.

While the festive period is not the best time to introduce a new cat or kitten to your home and family, if you do buy a pet over

Christmas, then on top of making sure they are microchipped, I would advise people to ensure they have checked the readily available advice on how you can buy your pet safely and responsibly.

Cats Protection reported that 8 out of 10 stray cats handed in to their adoption centres in England during 2018 were unchipped, leading to longer and sometimes unsuccessful efforts to reunite them with their owners. Stray cats lost this way include Larry the Cat, the brown and white tabby who was found in London without a microchip and taken to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, before being adopted as Chief Mouser to 10 Downing Street and the Cabinet Office.

Cats Protection's Chief Executive James Yeates said:

Cats Protection, as the leading cat charity, has campaigned for many years for microchipping to be made compulsory for owned cats, giving them the same protection as dogs if they get lost. Cats are a much loved part of the family in millions of homes, and it is heart-breaking if they go missing without a trace.

Sadly, it is not uncommon for cats to stray and go missing. Having a microchip gives a lost cat the best chance of being quickly reunited with their owner. We regularly hear heartwarming stories of the huge joy and relief when a missing cat is returned home thanks to the details of their microchip.

Battersea Deputy Chief Executive Peter Laurie said:

At Battersea we see strays being brought to us every day, many of which have clearly been much-loved pets that have perhaps just wandered too far from home. Unfortunately we are often unable to trace their previous owners as they have either not been microchipped or the details on the chip are not up to date.

We support compulsory microchipping of pet cats and we microchip every cat before they go to their new home. We would always recommend that owners not only get their cat microchipped but also ensure their contact details are kept up to date, so that if their pet does go missing, local authorities and rescues like Battersea can quickly reunite them.

The government is also taking this opportunity to consult on three separate mandatory scanning campaigns:

- Tuk's Law – which would make it mandatory for vets to scan cats and dogs for microchips before putting them down;
- Fern's Law – which would require vets to microchip cats and dogs when brought into a vet practice for the first time;

- and Gizmo's Legacy to make it mandatory to scan for microchips when a cat or dog is found dead by the roadside.

This announcement continues the renewed efforts from the government to raise standards on animal welfare even further now we are outside the EU, including [taking steps to end live animal exports](#), [ban the practice of keeping primates as pets](#), and crack down on the illegal smuggling of dogs and puppies, with further proposals to improve standards and eradicate cruel practices expected to be set out in the coming months.

[You can respond to the eight-week consultation by clicking here.](#)

[£23 million boost for British businesses through referral scheme](#)

News story

British businesses are getting more financing to help them expand and create new jobs thanks to government support, new figures show today.



- securing credit to grow is often a barrier for small and medium sized businesses
- the Bank Referral Scheme has helped over 880 businesses to access the investment they need to grow in the last 12 months
- funding through the scheme has increased by over a third in the last year to £23 million

Since its creation in 2016, the Bank Referral Scheme (BRS) has helped hundreds of small and medium-sized businesses to access finance after they were turned down by their bank. New figures out today show that over the past 12 months, 889 businesses have raised more than £23 million through the Scheme, which matches them with alternative sources of finance such as revolving credit and asset finance. This is a significant increase on the previous year and the initiative, introduced four years ago, has now raised

£56 million for businesses all over the UK.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, John Glen, said:

It's great to see businesses across the UK getting the investment they need to protect jobs and grow. By matching small businesses with alternative finance providers, this important scheme has delivered £23m in funding since July 2019.

The scheme was launched in November 2016 in response to evidence which suggested that after being turned down for a loan by their bank, small and medium-sized businesses rarely sought other options for financing.

It requires nine of Britain's biggest banks to pass on the details of businesses they have turned down for loans to online credit brokers. These platforms are, in turn, required to share their details, in anonymous form, with alternative finance providers, helping to facilitate a conversation between the business and any provider who expresses an interest in supplying finance to them.

Further information

- The British Business Bank administer the scheme on behalf of HM Treasury. This involves collating the data from platforms, as well as carrying out due diligence for platforms that apply to be designated.
- Businesses which have their loan application turned down by their bank are now automatically offered the opportunity to be referred to three government designated finance platforms: Alternative Business Funding, Funding Options and Funding Xchange. Each platform provides access to a range of lenders and products, including business loans, revolving credit, asset finance and invoice finance.
- Other finance providers with different business models are often more willing to lend to these SMEs. The Bank Referral Scheme helps to address this by giving businesses that are viable, but do not fit the risk appetite of the traditional banks, access to the finance they need to grow and thrive.

Published 23 December 2020

[Government announces £7.5 million funding to tackle loneliness during](#)

winter

- Support will target sectors that bring people and communities together including the arts, libraries, charities and radio
- Grants will be administered via Arts Council England, the Government's Loneliness Fund and two radio funds
- Move follows £4 million Local Connections Fund that will deliver over a thousand small grants to local community projects across the country

The Government has announced a £7.5 million funding package to help tackle loneliness over the winter period.

Following the recent news about the Tier 4 measures and with more people finding themselves alone this Christmas, this funding package will help provide immediate and targeted relief to those most at risk.

The funding will be targeted at sectors that are well-known for having the power to bring people and communities together such as the arts, libraries, charities and radio. It will be a lifeline to cultural organisations, charities and local community groups who are delivering much-needed work to ensure no one feels isolated in their local community.

The funding will be distributed via three existing schemes:

- £5 million to Arts Council England for arts and library services, of which £3.5 million has been awarded by DCMS to national charity The Reading Agency, for their Reading Well and Reading Friends programmes
- £2 million to extend the Government's Loneliness Fund launched in May this year
- £500,000 to be distributed amongst the Audio Content Fund and the Community Radio Fund

The package builds upon the [£4 million Local Connections Fund announced earlier this month](#), which will provide hundreds of small grants to charities and small grassroots organisations – such as book clubs, walking groups and other local projects – that are bringing communities together and reducing social isolation. Applications for the Local Connections Fund will open in early January.

Baroness Barran, Minister for Civil Society, said:

We are coming to the end of one of the toughest years we have ever had to face and I know that the next few months will be a worry for many people who have felt particularly isolated or lonely during the pandemic.

We still have some difficult times to overcome and it is important that we continue to provide support to those most at risk of isolation and loneliness over the next few months.

There is already such important work being done in the arts, library and radio sectors to help bring people together and tackle loneliness. I am thrilled that the £7.5 million funding package will have an immediate impact on those who need it most.

Some of the grants awarded by Arts Council England will be distributed via two existing programmes: Creative People & Places and Celebrating Age, which create opportunities for social connections through arts and cultural spaces in the community.

Creative People and Places has achieved over 5 million engagements to date in England. The Celebrating Age programme supports older people to engage with arts and culture as well as encouraging cultural spaces and organisations to be open, positive and welcoming places for older people. It has so far reached over 26,000 people.

The remainder of the Arts Council funding will be awarded to enhance and expand two successful programmes delivered by The Reading Agency: Reading Well Books on Prescription and Reading Friends. Funds will be used to provide the Reading Well mental health book collections for children, young people and adults to all public libraries in England, as well as significantly expand the delivery of Reading Friends through libraries – a shared reading model which uses reading to bring people together and tackle loneliness. An evaluation of Reading Friends found that 83% of participants and 95% of volunteers felt connected to other people after taking part.

Caroline Dinenage, Libraries Minister, said:

From hosting virtual versions of groups like Rhyme Time to making more of the most popular titles available for loan as ebooks, libraries across the country have adapted quickly to the pandemic so they can continue to act as a crucial community resource to people of all ages, and protect them from the risk of isolation.

This funding will enable The Reading Agency to deepen and widen the impact of their partnerships with libraries. It will also allow libraries' invaluable work to continue, with a particular focus on providing reading materials and support on how we can look after our mental health during this challenging winter period.

DCMS will also be extending the existing [Loneliness Grant Fund](#), to ensure that some of the organisations selected earlier this year can expand their current programmes or reach into new areas. This will help to ensure that these national organisations providing vital support for a wide range of vulnerable people at risk of loneliness, including the elderly, veterans, and people with disabilities, can support even more people.

In May nine organisations, including the EFL, RNIB, Alzheimer's Society and MIND were awarded a share of £5 million to reduce loneliness.

The remaining £500,000 will be distributed via two existing radio funds: the Community Radio Fund (CRF) and the Audio Content Fund (ACF).

Around 300 not-for-profit stations, staffed largely by volunteers, broadcast to around a million listeners per week, providing a lifeline to local communities who rely on these stations for up-to-date news and entertainment. These stations have been hit hard by the pandemic, with advertising revenues having dropped significantly. The CRF will provide £200,000 emergency funding to help stations meet the core costs of continuing to provide their vital services.

The Audio Content Fund exists to finance high-quality, public service radio programming for broadcast on UK commercial and community radio. The ACF will receive £300,000 to support the creation of content which will make listeners feel less lonely and connect the vulnerable with their communities this winter.

In addition, £600,000 will support small commercial radio stations with their transmission costs, and help secure their futures into the new year.

Today's announcement builds on previous work by the Government to reduce loneliness during the pandemic. Over £24 million of the [£750 million charity funding package](#) has gone directly towards reducing loneliness, and a further £45 million to organisations supporting people with their mental health.

And in June DCMS relaunched its long-running campaign, Let's Talk Loneliness, to remind people that there is no shame in asking for help. The [website](#) has lots of useful advice on how to help yourself and others safely.

Throughout December, DCMS are delivering a [Let's Talk Loneliness advent calendar](#) that shares practical advice, inspiring stories, and support routes to encourage people to take the first steps to alleviate loneliness in themselves and others.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Supplementary quotes:

Minister for Media and Data John Whittingdale said:

Part of radio's magic is its ability to bring listeners together and this year more than ever it has played a vital role, giving accurate and up-to-date news as well as entertainment to vulnerable, lonely and isolated people.

Today I am pleased to make a further £1.1 million in emergency funding available to the sector to make sure many of its brilliant programmes continue and smaller stations can keep providing the services so valued by communities.

Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair, Arts Council England, said:

We've seen the enormous impact programmes such as 'Creative People and Places' and 'Celebrating Age' and the lifeline they often provide for their communities. This new investment will build on the achievements of those programmes at a time when isolation and loneliness are affecting more people than ever before.

We are delighted that this new programme will reach those in greatest need, especially at such a challenging time.

Karen Napier, CEO of The Reading Agency said:

The Reading Agency is extremely grateful to receive this funding from DCMS. Tackling loneliness and mental health issues across the country has always been a priority for us and sits at the heart of our mission of tackling life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. 2020 has demonstrated that our work is needed more than ever, and this funding means that we are able to support the important work of every public library in England.

We are immensely proud of our Reading Well and Reading Friends programmes and look forward to expanding their reach and impact with thanks to this funding and by working in partnership with public libraries to aid the country's recovery in 2021. This feels like a real vote of continued confidence in the role of public libraries and their important contribution to society".

Sam Bailey, Managing Director of The ACF said:

Having demonstrated earlier this year how quickly and effectively the UK radio sector was able to mobilise to support its audiences, we are delighted that the UK government has come to us to distribute these funds. We know the audio production sector and our partners at radio stations will rise to the task, despite the need for a quick turnaround. Radio has always been brilliant at companionship, and we look forward to hearing brilliant ideas for demonstrating this under these circumstances that remain difficult for so many people".

Over the last three years, the UK Government has been leading the way on tackling loneliness:

- It created the world's first Minister for Loneliness and published the world's first Government loneliness strategy in October 2018, containing 60 commitments from nine Government departments. Implementation of the strategy is ongoing and the Government published a first annual report

- in January 2020 setting out our progress;
- It launched the first Government fund dedicated to reducing loneliness worth £11.5 million, which is supporting 126 projects to transform the lives of thousands of lonely people across England;
- It launched the inaugural #LetsTalkLoneliness campaign in June 2019 to help raise awareness and tackle stigma.

For further information please contact the DCMS press office on 020 7211 2210

Transitioning from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in Sudan

Mr President,

The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of this resolution, which outlines the modalities of an orderly and safe withdrawal of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). With the adoption of this resolution, the Security Council has reaffirmed the importance of the safety and security of peacekeepers and has further advanced the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in Darfur.

However, we regret that it was not possible to adopt a more prudent resolution that would have enabled UNAMID to continue to provide support to the Government of Sudan and the people of Darfur during its drawdown, in line with recent Security Council precedent on the closure of United Nations Peacekeeping missions.

United Nations peacekeeping missions in Haiti, Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste all had mandates until the end of their drawdowns. The position of the Government of Sudan, the recommendation of the United Nations and the African Union, and subsequently the position adopted by some members of this Council, prevented the Council from following this precedent. As such, UNAMID's mandate will end on 31 December, despite the fact that approximately 7,000 uniformed personnel and 900 civilian staff remain on the ground in Darfur. All they will be able to do is pack their bags and wait to leave Darfur.

Given its size and location within Sudan, UNAMID's withdrawal will be unlike any recent United Nations peacekeeping closure. This enormous logistical challenge is likely to be further complicated by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, there is a troubling precedent of handed over UNAMID teamsites and assets being looted, rendering them useless to the local authorities and people of Darfur.

Mr President,

The Government of Sudan requested the termination of UNAMID's mandate. It now has a responsibility, at both the national and local level, to cooperate fully with the United Nations and the African Union during UNAMID's drawdown and liquidation. The United Kingdom urges them to take all necessary steps to ensure that UNAMID, its personnel and their contingent owned equipment can depart from Darfur in an orderly and safe manner. We also call upon the Government of Sudan to ensure the security of handed over UNAMID team sites that will not be used by UNITAMS or its integrated Country Team and, in line with existing agreements, ensure their utilisation exclusively for civilian end-user purposes to benefit the people of Darfur.

In light of the termination of UNAMID's mandate, the responsibility for security, and specifically for protecting civilians in Darfur, now rests solely with the Government of Sudan. As recent spikes of violence in Darfur highlight, this will not be an easy undertaking. The United Kingdom welcomes the Government of Sudan's strong commitment to fully assume its responsibilities and urges them to implement swiftly their National Plan for Civilian Protection. In addition, we urge all parties to uphold all their commitments in the recently agreed Juba Peace Agreement and ensure its full implementation. Once fully operational, the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) will be able to play an important role in supporting the Sudanese authorities to build their civilian protection capacities. In this regard, we call on the Government of Sudan to cooperate fully with the United Nations as it seeks to swiftly operationalise UNITAMS, and ensure its transition from UNAMID is sustainable.

Mr President,

Whilst this resolution sets a clear path for the orderly and safe withdrawal of UNAMID, and transition to UNITAMS, we do not believe that it should set a precedent for future peacekeeping withdrawals. The United Kingdom hopes, where possible, the Council, and the United Nations, can return to the best practice of providing peacekeeping missions with mandates until the completion of their withdrawal as a means to ensuring safe and sustainable transitions from peacekeeping to peacebuilding.

[Protocol agreed to reopen French border to UK arrivals](#)

An agreement to reopen the UK-French border to allow accompanied freight services and some passenger services to resume between the two countries has been reached by the UK and French governments this evening (22 December 2020).

Rail, air and sea services will resume tomorrow morning, with all people travelling from the UK into France required to show proof of a negative

Coronavirus test taken within the previous 72 hours.

The protocol agreed with the French Government will be reviewed on 31 December, but could run until 6 January. All lorry drivers, irrespective of nationality, will require a lateral flow test.

This can detect the new strain of COVID-19 and provide results in around 30 minutes, rather than the 24 hours required after a PCR test.

The French government will also carry out sample testing on incoming freight to the UK.

The UK government continues to strongly urge hauliers not to travel to Kent until further notice, while a mass testing programme for HGV drivers gets underway to alleviate congestion at ports.

Operation Stack remains in force along the M20 while lorry drivers in Kent are continuing to be directed to the Manston holding facility, where they have access to food and welfare facilities.

Under the agreement announced this evening, admittance into France will only be granted to those travelling for urgent reasons – including hauliers – French citizens, and British citizens with French residency.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

I am pleased that we have made this important progress with our French counterparts this evening. This protocol will see the French border reopen to those travelling for urgent reasons, provided they have a certified negative COVID test.

We continue to urge hauliers not to travel to Kent until further notice as we work to alleviate congestion at ports.

The Transport Secretary also announced the [temporary relaxation of drivers' hours for hauliers](#) to help drivers get through UK borders safely, including via Kent, during the coming weeks. The rules will come in force from midnight tonight.