

Executive Summary

- We received 74 responses to our consultation with UK Bat Care Network members (to whom bat finders that contact the Helpline are directed) and bat groups on the future of how bat care calls should be handled by the National Bat Helpline.
- We presented four options in the consultation: 1. Volunteer call handlers covering both out of hours and in office hours, supported by BCT staff. 2. Regional/bat group helplines take bat care calls instead of the BCT Helpline. 3. Carers are advised of bat finders in their area and given their contact details via an online system. 4. Carer contact numbers are made available direct to the bat finders via an online system.
- The other services offered by the National Bat Helpline, including the Bat Advice Service for Natural England, remain unaffected by the outcome of this consultation.
- Option 1. came out as the clear preferred first choice for both UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups. Therefore, BCT will continue with the Volunteer Bat Care Helpline (VBCH) service; in office hours all year round and an emergency out of hours service over the busier summer months (May to September).
- The VBCH service has not been without issues. We will consider all of the feedback and suggestions about this option provided in the consultation responses. We will continue to work to improve the VBCH and endeavour to achieve a greater level of shift coverage and volunteer retention going forward.
- BCT recognises the value of Regional and Bat Group Helplines and how they contribute to the UK Bat Care Network. We think it is important to continue to support the running of these local volunteer helplines, and the setting up of new ones where bat groups and/or bat carers wish to do so.
- An online system that runs alongside the VBCH has the potential to enhance the bat care process for both bat finders and Network members. Development of such a system would be a long-term goal, but consultation findings will help inform any future advances.
- The consultation responses submitted will be used to inform the future development of the VBCH, the UK Bat Care Network and related services.
- Thank you to all of the UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups who took part in the consultation.

Report on the BCT Bat Care Call Handling Consultation

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Cover image: Word cloud made up of responses to a question about support provided to members of the UK Bat Care Network (see section 7. for more details).

1. Introduction

The National Bat Helpline is a small team devoted to 'helping people, helping bats'. Through the BCT website, email and phone, the Helpline deals with a wide variety of enquiries, from bats found in need of rescue, advice about works or pest control, reporting bat crime or where people have concerns about bat roosts. The Helpline relies on the hard work and dedication of hundreds of volunteers. This includes bat carers who rehabilitate injured bats, roost visitors who help homeowners with bat roosts, and volunteers that answer phones on the Volunteer Bat Care Helpline. The team receives over 14,000 enquiries each year from building and planning professionals, householders with bat roost questions, and members of the public who have found injured and grounded bats.

We are partially funded by Natural England to provide free advice for dwellings and places of worship with bats¹. However, we rely on the generosity of the public to help us fully fund this and other work we do protecting bats and their roosts.

In spring 2021 BCT changed the way that the National Bat Helpline operated, specifically around the handling of bat care related enquiries. These calls are being taken by volunteers, rather than responded to by BCT staff directly, although staff are continuing to support members of the UK Bat Care Network and BCT still works to promote bat care best practice. These changes are necessary because of a significant funding gap for the Helpline (see section 1.2 below), even with the generous contributions of BCT's supporters. We need to ensure that the service we provide is sustainable in the long term.

We sought the views of the UK Bat Care Network members (to whom bat finders that contact the Helpline are directed) and bat groups on the future of how bat care calls should be handled in the UK. This report sets out the results of that consultation. In proposing the way forward, we are mindful of our vision for the handling of bat care enquiries, that the changes we introduce will result in:

- Fewer bat care enquiries on the phone and through emails, but bat care will still be undertaken in a safe and positive way
- Disease risk will be appropriately managed, with good guidance available for carers, other bat handlers, and members of the public
- Bat carers and BCT will have a good relationship
- Members of the public who look to BCT for guidance will get help with grounded and injured bats from knowledgeable carers and ambulance drivers, and still be won over to bat conservation
- Bat carers will get the support they need in the form of information, resources, advice, or signposting
- The Helpline will be financially sustainable

¹ Under the Bat Advice Service for Natural England, the National Bat Helpline arranges an average of 790 volunteer bat roost visits for dwellings and 180 volunteer bat roost visits for places of worship every year.

Report on the BCT Bat Care Call Handling Consultation Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Aims of the consultation

We ran the consultation from Friday 5th November 2021 to Monday 17th January 2022, in order to gather views from UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups on the future of how bat care calls are handled in the UK, based around four broad options of:

- Volunteer call handlers covering both out of hours and in office hours, supported by BCT staff.²
- Regional/bat group helplines take bat care calls instead of the BCT Helpline.
- Carers are advised of bat finders in their area and given their contact details via an online system.
- Carer contact numbers are made available direct to the bat finders via an online system.

These options relate to the handling of enquiries from bat finders; we explained as part of the consultation that we envisaged the continuation of the UK Bat Care Network in some form irrespective of the outcome of the consultation.

The questions we asked can be found in the appendices (Appendix A has the version of the questionnaire for members of the UK Bat Care Network, and Appendix B has the version for bat groups).

1.2 Financial background

Prior to a cost cutting exercise in 2020/21, BCT had an overall deficit of £175,000 which was unsustainable. The three areas of BCT that had the largest deficits were the Bat Groups & Country Officers team (partly funded but with significant deficits across the three countries), the Helpline (bat care being the completely unfunded area) and Wildlife Crime (completely unfunded at that point). It was agreed by trustees and the senior management team that all of these areas of work are vital to BCT and bat conservation (which is why we had been subsidising them from reserves), but that it was not sustainable to continue subsidising them at the same level. So alongside continuing to try and fundraise for these areas, we needed to take action to reduce the deficit of each area.

The Helpline was asked to reduce their costs by £40,000. (Please see the Special Edition Bulletin from June 2021³, setting out the changes that have been introduced over the last year.) This means that even with changes to reduce staff time, BCT is still investing (c. £70,000) in the bat care area of the Helpline (assuming that the total can't be found through fundraising). This is currently still the greatest investment of BCT reserves that we make into any of our activities, but we recognise the value of bat care in supporting bat conservation.

² Since the start of summer 2021 we have been piloting a Volunteer Bat Care Helpline (VBCH), providing a service both out of office hours (as volunteers have done for many years) during the summer months and, for the first time, having volunteers take bat care related calls in office hours (all year round).

³ Special Edition Bulletin June 2021: <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Resources/Bat-Groups/Special-Edition-Bat-Group-Bulletins/Special-Edition-Bulletin-Update-on-National-Bat-Helpline-01-June-2021.pdf?v=1622540864>

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You can find more information about the breakdown of enquiries to the National Bat Helpline in the last annual report⁴, produced in 2019.

1.3 Participation by invitation

We invited members of the UK Bat Care Network (bat carers, ambulance drivers, bat hospitals, and existing local helplines) to submit individual responses, and received 50 submissions from Network members. We invited bat groups to each submit a response (collating views from their membership as appropriate) and received 24 submissions from bat groups.

1.4 Question and answer sessions

We held two online sessions for UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups to ask questions about the consultation (on Monday 15th November and Tuesday 14th December 2021). Both sessions started with an introduction to the consultations and then went through any questions that had been received in advance, before opening up to questions from participants. The questions and answers from these sessions were written-up, not as a verbatim record of the discussions but all of the questions asked (including some sent via email) were covered⁵.

1.5 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who took part in the question and answer sessions, and especially everyone who submitted a response to the consultation (we received 74 submissions in total) for taking the time to answer our questions and share their thoughts with us.

We would also like to thank the small team of advisors who contributed to brainstorming around options for the future of bat care call handling and also reviewed the questionnaire for us, we are grateful for their input.

⁴ National Bat Helpline Annual Report 2019: <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/uploads/pdf/National-Bat-Helpline-Report-2019.pdf?mtime=20210104160618&focal=none>

⁵ Bat Care Call Handling Consultation Q&A: <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Resources/Bat-Care-Calls-Consultation-QA.pdf?v=1639759002#asset:143154>

2. Overview Questions

2.1 Introduction

This section of the questionnaire aimed to get background information from the respondents to enable us to understand geographic coverage, range of experience and the different ways bat care operates in different areas. This information provides context to the responses to the consultation.

2.2 Summary of results

We received most responses from members of the UK Bat Care Network and bat groups based in England. Northern Ireland was not represented in terms of the Network, but the Northern Ireland Bat Group did respond, and we had further responses from two bat groups in Scotland, two in Wales, as well those in England. A total of 39 bat groups were represented across both bat group and UK Bat Care Network submissions. For 11 bat groups, we received responses from both UK Network members and the group itself; 12 groups made their own submissions only; and 16 groups were only represented by a submission from UK Bat Care Network member.

Most UK Bat Care Network members who responded belong to at least one bat group, although they tend to work most closely with their local group. Chat systems, such as WhatsApp are used widely for carers within a group to communicate with each other. Dedication of volunteers and coordinators comes out as something that works well across multiple groups. The lack of carers, distances to be covered, and lack of coordination were some of the more common issues with bat care within bat groups, from the perspective of the Network members. However, there were contradictions, with what one person highlighted as working well, another may highlight as something that doesn't work well. This emphasises the importance of some flexibility in the handling of bat care calls (as we currently have with both the National Bat Helpline and local helplines in place in some areas, as well as some carers taking calls directly from members of the public).

There are varying relationships between bat groups and bat carers/ambulance drivers from simply bat group membership or no association, through to highly organised bat care structures, and carers able to receive financial support from the bat group for their activities.

2.3 Analysis of results

UK Bat Care Network Members

Background questions on location, experience, and time on the Network

A total of 50 responses were received from members of the UK Bat Care Network. The vast majority (48) were from people based in England (with 30 counties represented), with one respondent based in Scotland and another in Wales.

We asked respondents about their position on the Network; 42 of respondents were bat carers, five were ambulance drivers and three responses were on behalf of regional

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helplines (not linked to a bat group). We didn't have any responses from wildlife hospitals or veterinary practices on the Network.

Almost half of respondents (24) have been caring for bats for over 10 years, with 15 respondents having been carers for 1-5 years, and 11 for 5-10 years. We asked people how long they had been on the Network and there was quite an even split across the categories with 16 respondents having been registered for 1-5 years, 17 for 5-10 years and 17 for more than 10 years.

Working with bat groups

We wanted to understand how Network members already worked with bat groups. Only three respondents aren't members of their local bat group, 29 belong to one bat group and 18 to more than one group. This membership is spread across 25 different bat groups (24 in England and one in Wales). Only 21 respondents were also responding to their bat group's consultation submission. This might reflect the fact that roughly a third of bat groups participated in the consultation (16 bat groups were only represented in the consultation by a submission from UK Bat Care Network member). It may also relate to whether or not bat groups sought input for their submissions. For four of the bat groups that submitted responses, there were also submissions from Network members who stated they were members of those groups but that they were not contributing to the group's submission.

We wanted to understand how bat care operates within the bat groups that UK Bat Care Network members are associated with. As there may be multiple approaches, we allowed people to select each of the options, as set out in the table below:

How does bat care operate within the bat group you are most active with?	Count
The bat group operates a centralised system for bat care (a regional helpline, WhatsApp group, etc.).	14
Certain bat group members serve as carers and take bat care calls individually but are supported by bat group resources with training and recruitment organised through the bat group.	25
Certain bat group members serve as carers without direct support from the bat group.	15
The bat group doesn't get involved with bat care or record which members are carers.	5
Other.	4

For the responses that answered 'other' to the question above, two reflected changes in organisation between the bat group and carers over time, including an increasingly informal association, another didn't know due to lack of communication, and the fourth referred to use group chat only when individually unable to handle calls.

Where respondents worked with multiple groups, we asked how bat care operated within those other groups. There were 19 responses to this question. As with the responses for the groups they are most active with, the responses reflected a mixture of very organised, structured working down to informal contact. Most respondents (13) emphasised

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communication between carers, such as use of WhatsApp groups and phone. Some respondents referred to not knowing or there being no centralised system or support from the other groups they work with. It was interesting to note some contradictions between responses referring to the same bat group (for one group it was stated they didn't have any system for bat care by one respondent, yet another stated the same group had a centralised system) but that may reflect having a variety of working practices in place (hence allowing respondents to choose multiple responses in relation to how bat care operates).

A total of 46 respondents answered the question 'What do you think works well with the way bat care operates currently within the group(s), and why does it work well?'. The responses were very varied. Effective communications, such as use of WhatsApp or similar, came up multiple times (10 responses) as did the dedication of the volunteers involved in care or in coordinating care (12). Whilst some respondents felt working as individuals registered on the UK Bat Care Network worked more effectively than a local helpline, for others it was having local coordination to field calls that worked best. It is essential for BCT to understand these varying views. It highlights that a single solution will not suit everyone. The detailed responses to these questions will help us with the support we offer to the UK Bat Care Network and to bat groups (where applicable).

We asked, 'What do you think doesn't work well with the way bat care operates currently within the group(s), and why doesn't it work well?' and had 42 responses. As with what works well, there was quite a variety of responses. The most common issue was a lack of carers and/or ambulance drivers (18), some areas having little or no coverage, and the associated overwhelm for those that are active. Another recurring theme was time (seven), especially where people are also ecological consultants or with other work commitments. One person mentioned protection of bat workers and that giving out bat carers numbers to members of the public could prevent people from wanting to participate. Another felt advice around GDPR, and finders' numbers would be helpful. Although the use of messaging systems was stated as a positive previously, one responded highlighted the fact that at busy times of the year requests can get missed. A couple of people also mentioned the issues with multiple routes to reach carers or ambulance drivers, via BCT, Facebook, direct phone calls, etc. Two people referred to issues with the National Bat Helpline, specifically the time it can take to get through when busy and carers having not updated their availability.

Taking calls from the public

We wanted to understand whether members of the UK Bat Care Network already take calls directly from the public without them having come through the National Bat Helpline. Of the 50 respondents, 12 don't take other direct calls but 38 do, and these come in a variety of ways with the most common being word of mouth, social media, vets and other wildlife rescue centres or conservation organisations, see the table below.

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How have the members of public got your phone number/contact details?	Count
Word of mouth (e.g. previous call outs/number passed on by someone else)	14
Social media (e.g. Facebook or Twitter)	13
Veterinary surgery	10
Local wildlife rescue centre/other wildlife or conservation organisations	10
Bat group list of bat carers/bat group website/carers own website	8
BCT website	4
Other websites and helplines	3
Other bat workers	2
Ecological consultant	2
Library	1
Attendees at bat walks or talks	1

Bat Groups

Geographic spread of bat groups

A total of 24 responses were received from UK bat groups. The majority (19) were English bat groups (with approximately 20 counties represented), with two Welsh bat groups, two Scottish bat groups and the Northern Ireland Bat Group. For 11 bat group areas, we received responses from both UK Network members and the group itself; for 12 bat group areas we only had the group's own submission.

Consultation with bat group members

All those responding on behalf of bat groups stated they had consulted with other members of the group. Five respondents stated they had consulted committee members/trustees only. Four respondents only consulted with members involved with bat care, and a further seven consulted with both committee/trustees and those involved with bat care. Nine groups consulted with their full membership. It is worth noting that one respondent specifically mentioned that, although they had consulted with the whole group, they didn't get any response from members.

How bat care operates within the bat group

We asked the same question of bat groups as we asked of UK Bat Care Network members who work with bats groups (again, with the respondents being able to choose all that apply):

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How does bat care operate within the bat group you are most active with?	Count
The bat group operates a centralised system for bat care (a regional helpline, WhatsApp group, etc.).	10
Certain bat group members serve as carers and take bat care calls individually but are supported by bat group resources with training and recruitment organised through the bat group.	10
Certain bat group members serve as carers without direct support from the bat group.	4
The bat group doesn't get involved with bat care or record which members are carers.	2
Other.	4

For the responses that answered 'other' to the question above, one referred to a carer being financially supported by the bat group, who then delivers some training to others that the person can then call on when needed, the group doesn't get involved beyond that. Another respondent referred to a separate group in the county dealing with bat care but that the members of the bat care organisation all also being members of the bat group. For another bat group there is a local helpline that covers a slightly different area to that of the bat group, with the bat group providing some financial support for bat carers where requested, taking care of donations for bat rehabilitation, and communicating about training. The final response was in relation to a new bat group that as yet doesn't have any carers but does have members interested in training as such in the future. The final 'other' response expanded on the use of WhatsApp, with a single person receiving calls and members of the public also sending in requests via other routes such as email and social media.

3. Option 1. Volunteer Bat Care Helpline

3.1 Introduction

The Volunteer Bat Care Helpline (VBCH) has been running an out of hours summertime service for 18 years. In 2021 BCT launched the pilot VBCH, operating during office hours (IOH) as well as out of hours (OOH). As this has been a pilot project, we requested feedback and comments for this option. As aforementioned we received a total of 74 responses to the survey, 50 from Bat Care Network members, and 24 from Bat Groups filled out by one representative.

To give some more background to the VBCH; currently, volunteers self-assign to VBCH shifts in advance. The target number of volunteers per shift is calculated based on average bat care call volumes since 2016 and is designed to make shifts manageable for volunteers. For example, in July, four volunteers are required per IOH shift, and two per OOH shift to cover approximately 60 cases per day. In December however, we need only one volunteer per IOH shift to cover an average of five calls per day. Meeting target volunteer coverage has been a challenge. For example, six IOH and 14 OOH shifts were closed entirely between May-September due to a lack of available volunteers, and 43% of IOH shifts July-August had only one volunteer available. However, we have amended recruitment targets and are trialling new volunteer engagement and retention activities. As a result, coverage for IOH over winter is looking much better. From September – February 76% of IOH shifts had full coverage of volunteers.

3.2 Summary of results

The feedback for the VBCH as it was managed in 2021 was mostly positive or neutral from both UK Bat Care Network members and the bat group respondents. We compiled the data into concerns and suggestions for further considerations of any changes needed to the VBCH.

The concerns for the VBCH are outlined below, these are addressed in section 9, Proposal for the Future.

- Delays in call answering times
- Bat carers receiving calls for outside of their area
- Volunteer's geography knowledge
- There have been reports of bat finders not receiving calls back after leaving a message
- Volunteers not turning up to shifts
- An 'understaffed' VBCH will just cause confusion and frustration

We also appreciate those respondents who suggested alternate ways of working so the quality of the VBCH could improve. This summer we are aiming to recruit 120 new volunteers, as well as retain some that volunteered over the winter season. All volunteers must attend a training day covering bat care, release advice, technology on the VBCH, how to handle a call etc. There is a member of staff that checks the bat care forms that are

submitted to our database, and there is the ability to listen back to calls for quality assurance. The volunteers receive feedback throughout their Bat Watches (shifts) from their Back Up Staff. If we have a Bat Watch with no volunteers available to assist at all, we send an email to all relevant parties to let them know that the Bat Care Helpline is closed. We are monitoring the volunteer application forms to ensure we have an even shift coverage from volunteers over the season. Many of the concerns have been addressed through ongoing updates and changes as we have been adapting to a new volunteer system, as well as the pilot VBCH.

Suggestions outlined from the survey:

- Train volunteers with basic bat care experience
- More volunteers
- Better for VBCH or BCT to phone carers, rather than finders to call carers
- Quality assurance for volunteers
- Inform network carers and regional helplines when the national helpline is closed unexpectedly

We asked bat groups if they would be able to support the handling of bat care calls through the VBCH by asking their members if they would volunteer. Individual groups offered varied amounts of support through numbers of volunteers throughout the year.

Bat groups were also asked if they would be able to support engagement of new volunteers for the VBCH; most of the positive replies would take the form of the provision of volunteers. Most of the bat groups would not be able to provide support to volunteers taking calls, due to lack of capacity (time, members, volunteers) and that the role is unclear.

Generally, the bat groups feel that the VBCH is the best option of the four provided.

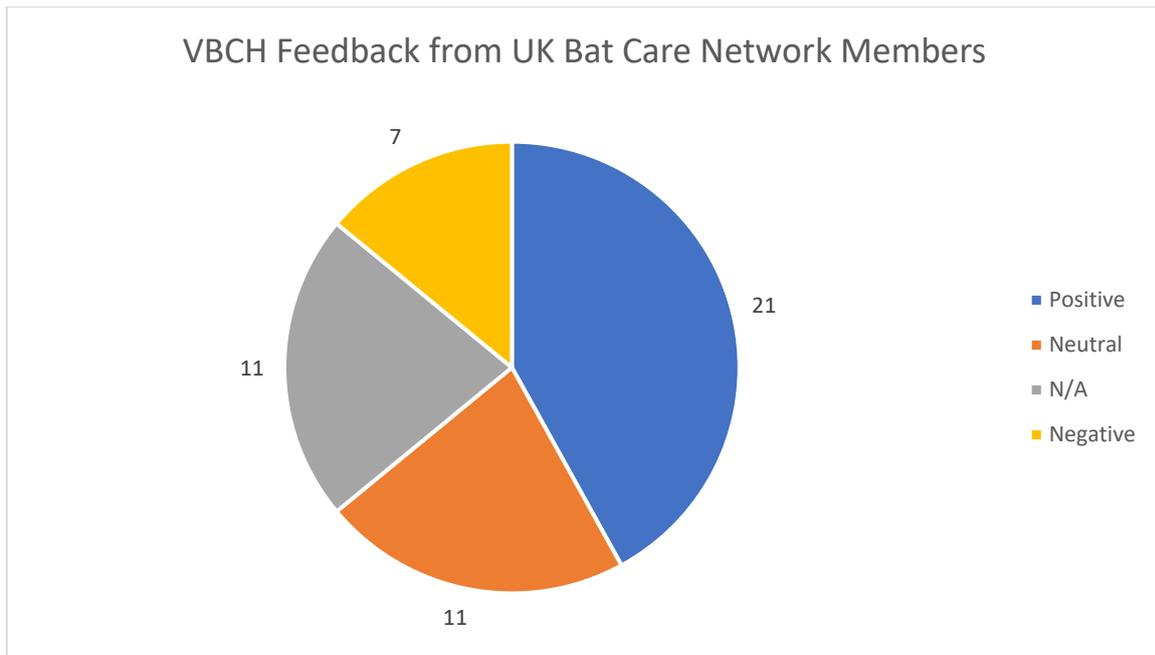
3.3 Analysis of results

UK Bat Care Members

We would like your feedback on how well you believe the VBCH pilot has worked this year. Please state whether your comments relate to your direct experience with finders or comments made by others.

To summarise the feedback provided by the UK Bat Care Network members, the answers were coded into four categories in response to the VBCH. The results are set out in the chart below.

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Section 3. Option 1. Volunteer Bat Care Helpline



Are there any other comments that you wish to make about the option of continuing with the VBCH?

There is room for improvement on the VBCH system, so from the first two questions we pulled out the comments and suggestions, below is a summary of the results.

A total of 40 UK Bat Care Network members respondents provided feedback:

Comments	Count
Call waiting times are too long	7
Worries about volunteers (difficult to rely on, more volunteers are needed)	4
Noticed little difference between old system and VBCH	2
Will volunteer as a VBCH volunteer	2
Appreciated when a caller comes through VBCH & BCT with a bat safely contained.	2
Preferred when BCT rang carers to ask for support	2
Telephone number is accessible to most	1
Do not consider asking volunteers to cover IOH calls is acceptable	1
Great that finders are given more than one carer's number (depending on location)	1
The volunteers are doing a good job of promoting bats	1
Inform carers and helplines when helpline is closed	1

A total of 26 respondents provided suggestions; summarised below:

Suggestions	Count
Keep VBCH	11
More volunteers are needed	5
Improved volunteer training (quality assurance, geographic locations)	4
Can resources from other parts of the BCT be paused to support this vital resource	1
Good opportunity to improve technologies	1

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If no volunteer is available, the caller should be directed to counties bat groups preferred system	1
Better if BCT or VBCH call carers, rather than giving out phone numbers to finders	1
Improve the automated [message] system	1

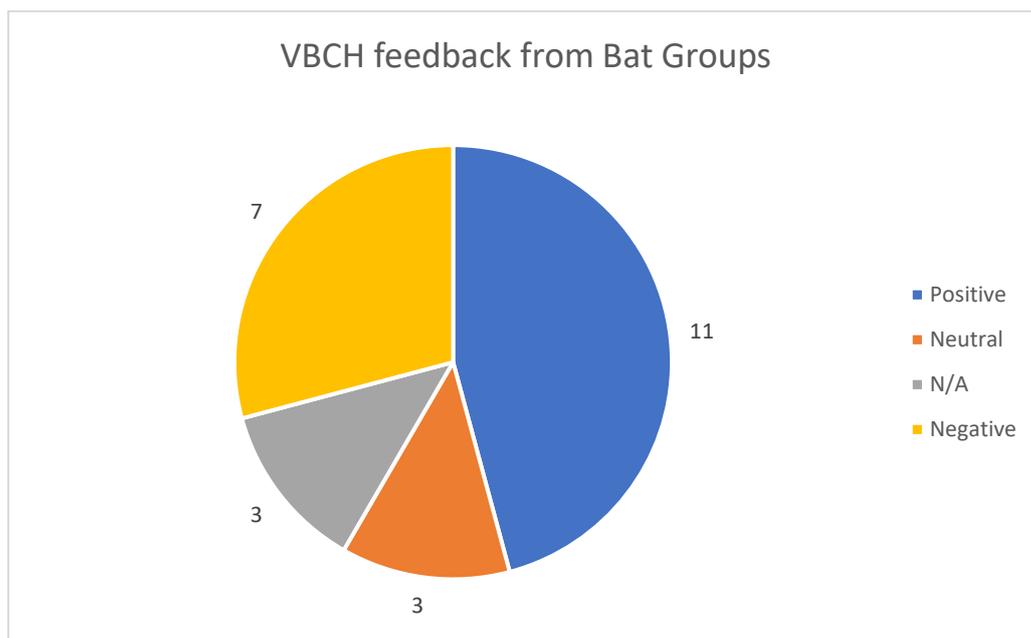
From this table, those that have not provided feedback felt it was not suitable to comment as they have not been as active over the past year or chose not provide any comment.

Bat Groups

Similarly, we asked the bat groups the following questions to summarise the attitude towards the VBCH. We asked further questions to ascertain if bat groups could offer any support if this option is the favoured one from this report. There was a total of 24 responses from bat groups. The questions are answered and summarised below:

We would like your feedback on how well you believe the VBCH pilot has worked this year. Please state whether your comments relate to your direct experience with finders or comments made by others.

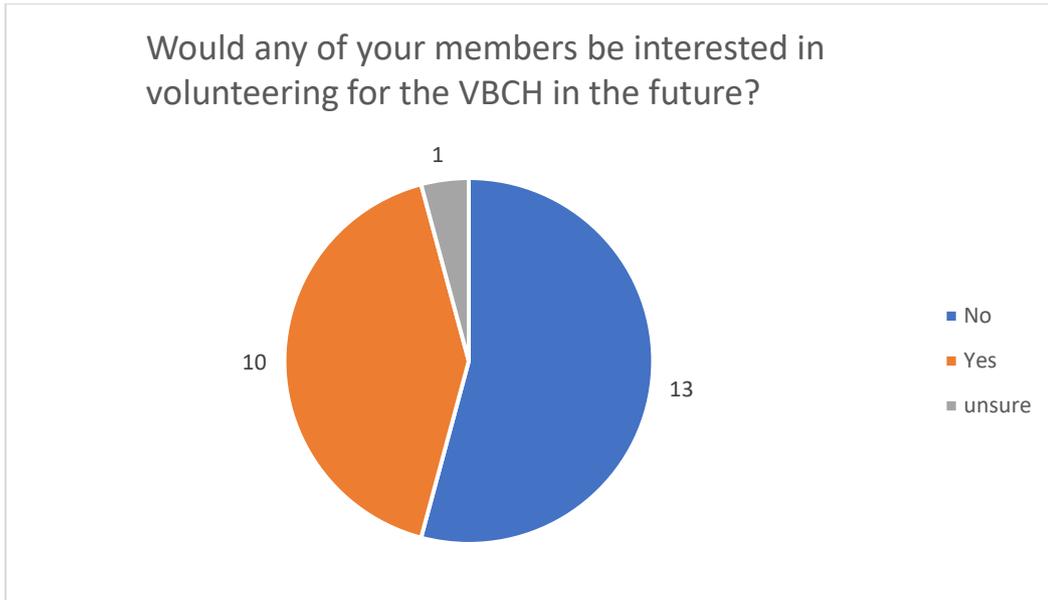
Once again, the responses to the first question were coded into four categories and the answers are as shown in the chart below.



One challenge with this approach to the handling of bat care calls is having enough volunteers, so we'd like to gauge bat group members' interest in volunteering for BCT in this capacity. We know that carers are already busy, especially over the summer months. Would any of your members be interested in volunteering for the VBCH in the future?

The results are set out in the chart and tables below.

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Section 3. Option 1. Volunteer Bat Care Helpline



How many members would be interested in volunteering?

Number of members interested in volunteering.	Count
1	4
8	1
2 or more	1
unsure	4

Would they be interested in volunteering during:

Season	Count
Don't know.	5
Both spring/summer and autumn/winter months.	4
The autumn/winter months.	1

Roughly how many shifts (across all the potential volunteers) per month?

Number of shifts	Count
6	2
1 or 2	1
2 or 3	1
Unknown	5
6 = once per fortnight	1
3 = once per week	
2 = once per month	

Would your bat group be able to support the engagement of new volunteers for the Volunteer Bat Care Helpline?

Twelve bat groups would be able to support the engagement of new volunteers, but 10 would not.

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Section 3. Option 1. Volunteer Bat Care Helpline

How would you be prepared to help (e.g. assisting with the recruitment, assisting with training, provision of volunteers, etc.)?

Of the 12 Bat Groups that said yes:

Provision of volunteers	8
Assisting with recruitment, assisting with training, provision of volunteers	1
Assisting with training	1
Assisting with recruitment, provision of volunteers	1
Assisting with training, provision of volunteers	1

At the moment the service uses BCT staff as back up support (BUS) to the volunteers. Would your bat group be able and willing to provide support to the volunteers taking calls (e.g. providing encouragement and guidance on procedural queries)?

Of all bat groups, 17 said they would not be willing to provide support, five said they would, and one said perhaps.

Please explain the reason for your answer to the last question:

Yes	We can provide guidance and training where necessary
Yes	We have a number of very experienced carers.
Yes	Possibly, but it depends how this would be operated – locally or nationally? If it's nationally then most members would struggle. Members of the bat group have other commitments, such as work, families, hobbies and bat care.
Yes	We would be happy to provide support and guidance where possible and necessary.
Yes	As we have plenty of experience with rescues and calls and know what we want/need from a call handler we could help with general procedural guidance.
Perhaps	It depends on the type of query, how frequently it occurs and willingness of carers to do this.
No	To be honest, we don't really know, without having a better idea of what would be involved. The risk is that the responsibility would end up with people already heavily involved in bat care.
No	Unsure of availability to commit at current time.
No	We haven't polled members but suspect a lack of capacity - most members work so are not necessarily available in terms of having time to do so. Concern about having the appropriate knowledge / skills depending on the queries.
No	We cover a large area and don't have enough capacity at present to manage the number of calls that we get, so our priority for 2022 is to increase our local capacity.
No	In reality I don't know, but the person who holds the 'bat phone' may be able to provide this service.
No	We have a very small membership with several of these members already acting as bat care trainees and ambulance drivers. As such the committee doesn't feel that it has a large enough membership to be able to offer a supporting role.
No	We would prefer to recruit bat group members to volunteer for our own regional helpline. We feel our regional network works well and would not have the resources to support bat group members volunteering outside of our regional helpline nor unfortunately to support non bat group volunteers taking BCT helpline calls that may have nothing to do with our area.

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Section 3. Option 1. Volunteer Bat Care Helpline

No	It's not clear exactly what support is required. If it is to have someone on call for the VBCHs to call if they are having difficulty with a call, then we probably can't always provide this. If it is someone they can call later to talk through how they should handle a similar call next time then that's fine.
No	We do not have the expertise or the capacity within the group to support this.
No	Our volunteers are already stretched in terms of their full-time jobs, families, bat rescue, volunteer roost visits & NBMP & surveys which is why we have removed a phone helpline in Northern Ireland so that volunteers aren't contacted directly. Instead an online form is sent to emails of the volunteers who agreed to share info to the WhatsApp group.
No	We have very little interest expressed in helping to deal with grounded bat enquiries.
No	Not enough time Members don't feel have the necessary knowledge.
No	We have limited voluntary admin support for the group, which only just copes with current workload. In addition in recent years, membership of the group has grown significantly but the vast majority of these members are professional ecologists, already VERY busy in summer.
No	We wouldn't agree to help if we couldn't commit the time
No	We are unable to promise bat group help but might be able to provide a certain amount of backup from individuals.
No	We don't have people willing to get involved other than those who are already carers and unable to take on more commitments.
No	We have few active members and those who are active are already at capacity with other activities.

Are there any other comments that you wish to make about the option of continuing with the VBCH?

Other comments

We felt strongly that this was the best option (other than having the helpline well enough funded to be covered by paid staff)

We believe out of the options that this is the best one, with perhaps a mash up of option 3/4 too.

We feel that a central national helpline is the preferred option although there are concerns about it being solely reliant on volunteers and the risks of shifts not being covered etc. We would support any moves (fundraise / campaign for central govt funds etc) to allow the care helpline to be better supported by staff.

The system generally worked well this year, other than the examples mentioned above. We like the fact that there is one telephone number to publicise and to know that consistent and correct advice is given out to finders.

This system plus our bat group helpline works well for us at the moment.

Although only a small number of our members responded, the general feeling was that replacing the helpline with VBCH is not feasible; and that replacing the entire helpline with volunteers is a major step back for BCT in terms of helping people from a wider variety of background to get involved with conservation or indeed bats.

We, as a very small bat group do not have the capacity to run our own Help Line. It is very important that there is a regulated and consistent approach which having a centralized

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system can only supply. It is important to have the back up of BCT for training for example. Having BCT back up also is helpful to the carer. The carer can refer back to BCT if required if a call does not turn out to be straight forward. It should be remembered that many bat carers work alone, there is a Health and Safety issue here. It is far more unlikely that a bogus caller would engage with an organisation such as BCT. The mixed approach as outlined in the intro to the next option seems to be a very valuable approach and where possible should be maintained.

We think this is the ideal option, but we recognise that it can't happen without significant volunteer support which, at present, or members don't feel able to give.

4. Option 2. Regional/Bat Group Helplines

4.1 Introduction

This option would remove the role of the BCT Helpline and instead calls would go directly to the network of local and regional helplines across the UK to which bat finders would be directed (for example via the BCT website). Local and regional helplines would be responsible for receiving all bat care calls at a central number, advising bat finders as appropriate, delegating calls to the nearest carer, and ensuring health & safety protocols are followed. If no regional helpline was present in an area, finders would be directed to take bats to vets instead (support is available to vets via the BCT website). More information about the National Bat Helpline's current bat care call handling procedure can be found on the UK Bat Care Network pages on the BCT website.

4.2 Summary of results

Overall, the feedback we received about a move towards this option is negative. This section of the survey had branching questions. For clarity we will summarise the UK Bat Carer Network individual responses, followed by the Bat Groups responses. To review, the individual UK Bat Care network members do not see this as a viable option on its own due to time constraints, and there is concern over the potential for over-working already busy individuals. Similarly, the Bat Groups suggest that there are not likely to be enough volunteers for this to be consistent approach UK wide, and bat workers are busy enough. There is more nuance to this section with both more disadvantages and advantages discussed below. The regional helplines we have in place at the moment are bolstered/supported by the VBCH, so using more than one option in tandem should be seen as a possibility.

UK Bat Network Care Members

Most respondents (33) do not have a regional/bat group helpline in their area, and four are unsure whether there is one. There are 13 individuals that do have a regional/bat group helpline in their area. There are multiple reasons why individuals do not have a local regional/bat group helpline for this. The amount of work involved, and availability of suitable volunteers are considered as barriers to setting one up. Local helplines that have been disbanded did so because the BCT Helpline replaces the need, or the running of one takes too much time.

The most cited advantages of this system referred to the benefits of a helpline being local. Eleven of the respondents could see no advantages of this option being used. On the other hand, the most cited disadvantages of this system referred to recruitment of volunteers, and that this could increase the pressure on individuals leading to them being overwhelmed.

In terms of assisting with bat group/regional helplines, responses give a clear view that individuals are happy to continue their bat care work as individuals but are not prepared to take on more responsibility. If individuals are to work with other groups, most would favour one group local to themselves. UK Bat Care Network members recognise the knowledge

held in BCT's National Helpline and this system would see the loss of some of that knowledge. Most individuals (17) acknowledged the value in peer support in terms of knowledge sharing and experiences.

This option requires the support of individual volunteers to create helplines and set up bat groups. This part of the survey has illuminated the fact that whilst there are some advantages to this option, most UK Bat Care Network members do not have the time or capacity to take on more responsibility themselves and consider recruiting additional volunteers to support this activity to be a significant barrier.

Bat Groups

There were 24 respondents that represented bat groups, one third (eight) do have a regional/bat group helpline in operation in their area, and half of those four) that do currently have a region/bat group helpline would consider providing support to new regional or local helplines that are local to them.

There are many barriers to setting up a regional/bat group helpline, most cited are limited capacity, lack of volunteers, or running costs. Helplines that have disbanded in the past have done so due to lack of capacity. Some bat groups use WhatsApp to organise the care of bats in their local area, however they are not operating as a bat group helpline in the formal sense.

Bat groups noted that there are advantages of this system, mostly around the benefits of knowledge being local. On the other hand, the key disadvantages mentioned most are resourcing and capacity in setting up or maintaining a helpline. The general responses to this option are that it is too much commitment in terms of time to run, bat workers are busy enough, and there aren't enough members to sustain or implement a regional/bat group helpline. There was a comment about the current (VBCH) system as it reduces the work of the local helplines.

4.3 Analysis of results

UK Bat Care Network Members

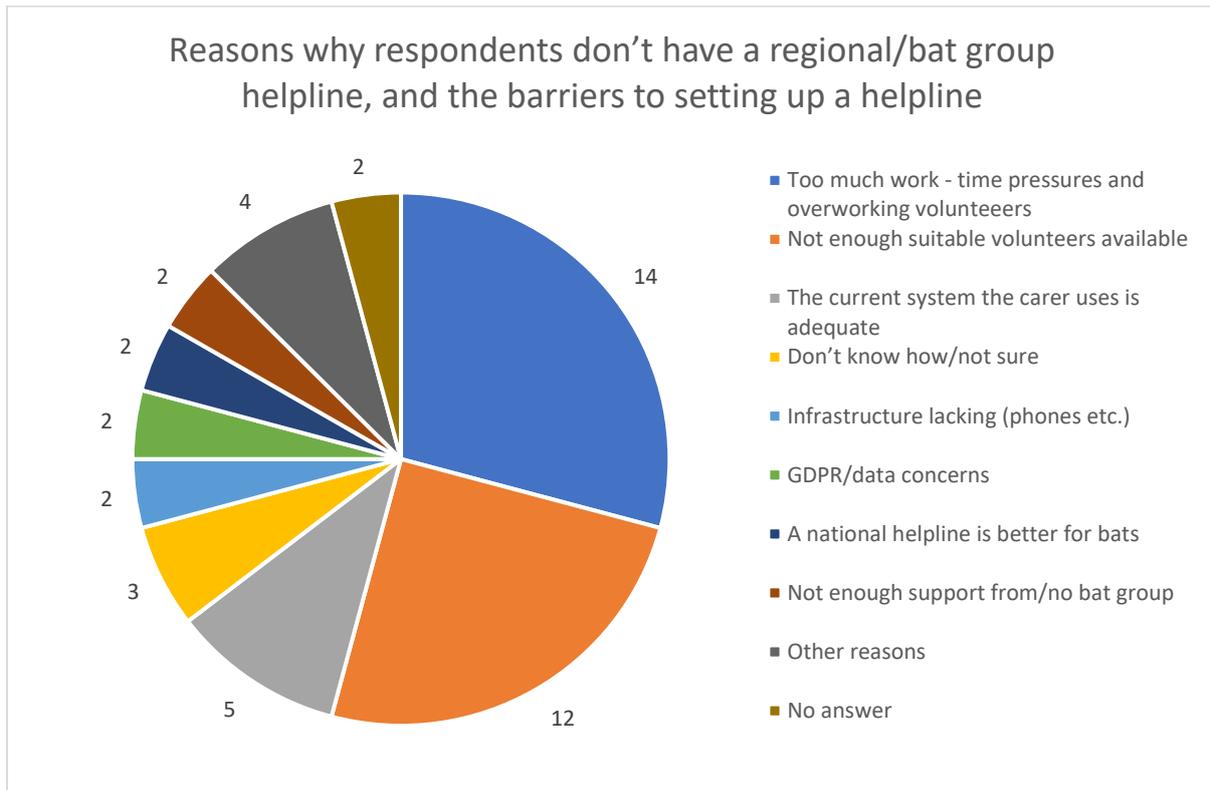
We asked bat carers if they have a regional/bat group helpline in operation in their area, 13 out of a total of 50 respondents answered yes. Of those 13, 12 would consider providing advice or support to new local or regional helplines being set up (by replying yes or possibly with caveats). Some said this would only be possible during quieter times of the year, others have said it would depend on the time and commitment required. One respondent said they'd be unwilling to help with this, and another said that other groups with different systems would be better placed to provide this support.

Furthermore, of these 13, nine would consider working with neighbouring bat groups to set up a regional helpline covering a larger area, whereas four would not. Four respondents were unsure whether they have a regional/bat group helpline in their area.

There are 33 bat carers who do not currently have a regional/bat group helpline in operation in their area, and four do not know if they have a regional/bat group helpline in

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operation locally. Below is a chart portraying why, and what the barriers are to setting up a helpline. Those 37 Bat Carers were also asked if would cooperate with other bat groups, of which 15 replied identifying which local bat groups they would co-operate with. All of the bat groups suggested were in adjacent counties (local to the UK Bat Network Member). To summarise the data collected, six respondents said they would work with one other local bat group, three said they would work with two local bat groups. One respondent said they would work with three other local bat groups. Five of the respondents said they would work with any local bat groups. This question was not answered by 18 respondents.



If you used to have a regional/bat group helpline and it ceased operating, please can you explain why?

Four respondents answered this question. In two responses, the regional Helpline stopped because the BCT Helpline replaced the need for a regional Helpline. One respondent mentions a lack of technology allowing for bats to be matched to carers, and a second comments that there was a lack of volunteers able to commit the time needed to answer the calls.

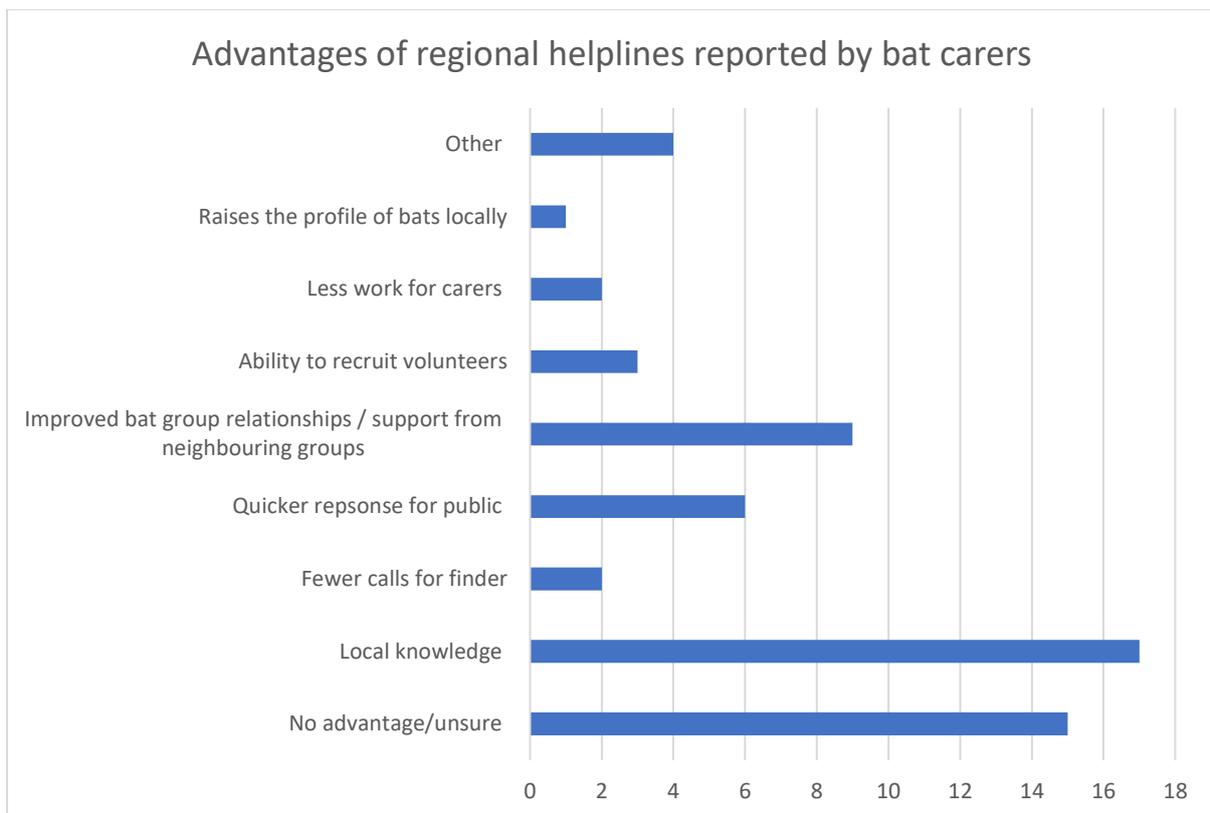
What do you see as the advantages of a regional/bat group helpline?

Many respondents listed multiple advantages to this system. The majority (17) of the advantages cited referred to the benefits of a helpline being local, with 14 people recognising that this would bring greater knowledge of regional differences, such as the geographical area and carer availability. Three people also cited the advantage of being able to store local bat records, which they consider to be helpful in identifying problem roosts, etc. Nine commented that this method would help with bat career relationships both within and between bat groups, with better connections and support. Two respondents cited

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benefits to bat finders in that they would need to make fewer phone calls to access help, and six thought that responses to requests from finders would be quicker via a regional helpline. Three thought that this method would allow for more volunteers to be recruited for call handling.

Other advantages mentioned just once or twice include: less work for carers, raising the profile of bats locally, regional phone numbers being easy to find, and two comments were generally positive about regional helplines but only if run in conjunction with a national helpline. Eleven of the respondents could see no advantages of a regional/bat group helpline.

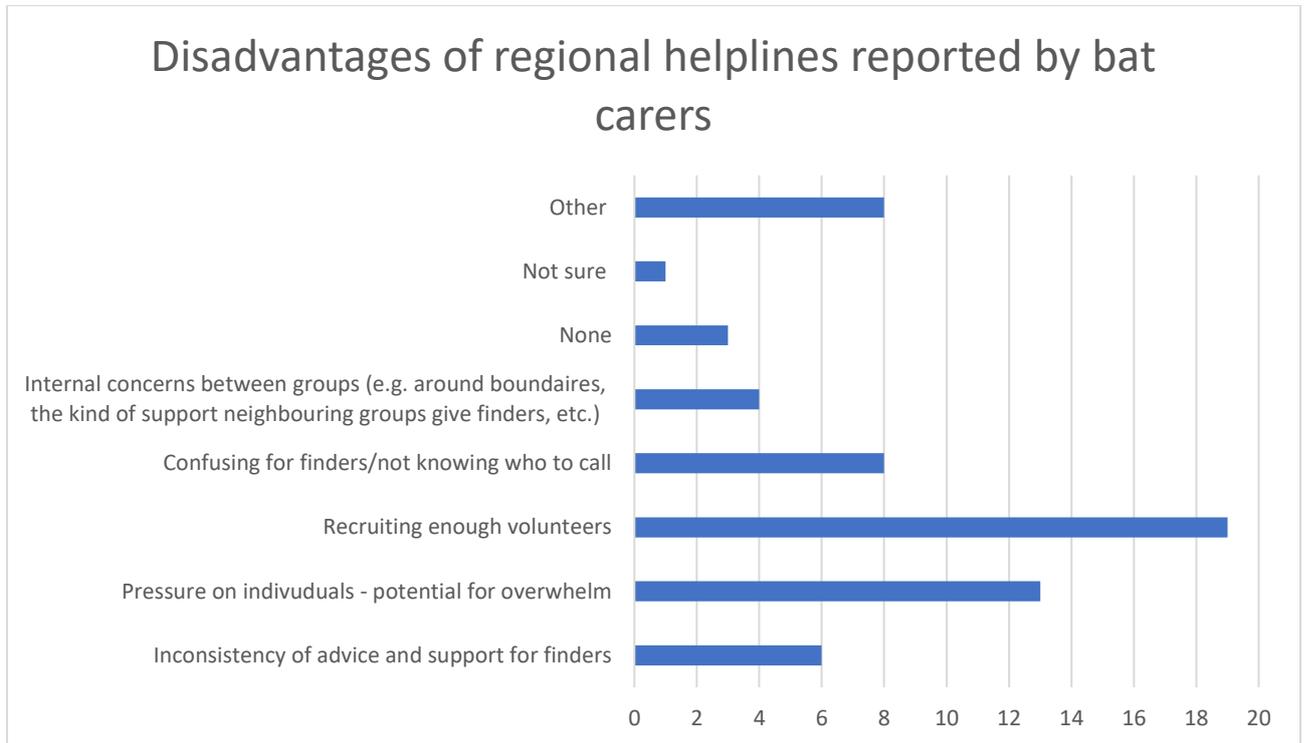


What do you see as the disadvantages of a regional/bat group helpline?

Many respondents also listed multiple disadvantages. The majority (19) of the disadvantages mentioned referred to recruitment of volunteers, with 13 people recognising that this could increase the pressure on individuals leading to them being overwhelmed. Eight people also cited that one disadvantage of this system is that it would be confusing for finders, as they may not know who to call. Similarly, six cited inconsistencies of advice and support for finders. Four respondents mentioned that there could be internal concerns between groups, for example, worries about boundaries, different support neighbouring groups would give finders.

Other disadvantages mentioned just once or twice include longer call length than now, removal of carer autonomy, difficulty in managing public expectations, data management responsibilities, lack of access to phones, lack of oversight and support, increased rabies risk, and there were further unspecific disadvantages to this option, but the previous

summary captures all comments. Three of the respondents could see no disadvantages of a regional/bat group helpline.



If you are a bat carer or ambulance driver that works independently from a bat group, would you be prepared to work with a regional/bat group helpline, allowing them to direct calls to you?

There were 27 answers to this question, three were negative, 14 were positive, and 10 replied maybe to working with a regional/bat group helpline.

Would you consider running a regional/bat group helpline and/or co-operating with other bat groups and/or carers to run a helpline?

There were 37 responses to this question, of which 22 said no, four said yes, and 11 said maybe.

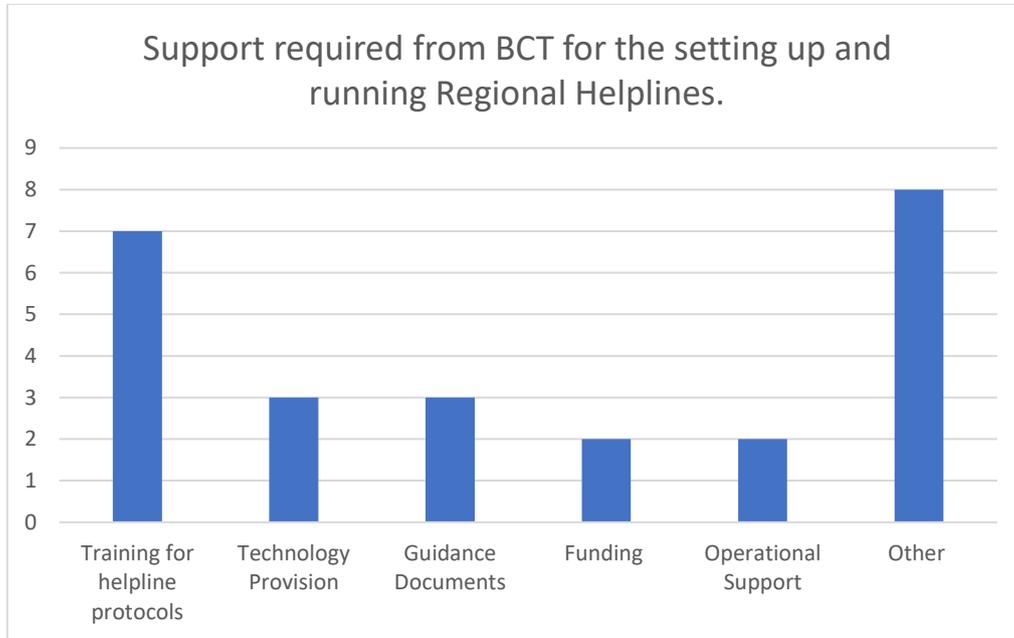
What would you want to see in terms of support from BCT in setting up and/or maintaining your regional/bat group helpline?

The responses were given by 16 individuals, who gave multiple answers. The most cited was the need for training in helpline protocols, there is a lot of knowledge in BCT and Regional Helplines would want to feel equipped for the role. Other suggested support and maintenance that could be considered were the provision of technology, publication of guidance documents, funding, and operational support. There were other answers that did not fit into any category:

- A complaints system
- A dedicated staff member
- Central automated system to relay information

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- Support for the legal, technical and welfare advice
- Unsure
- Vetting members (training, vaccinations)
- Volunteer expenses
- Volunteer provision.



What would you want to see in terms of peer support from fellow volunteer helplines, for example in the sharing of experiences and knowledge?

Most of the 17 respondents to this question acknowledged the value in peer support. Eleven cited the need to share general knowledge and experiences, most of which suggested meeting regularly, both online and in person. The six other responses were a mix of what should be shared (how to deal with difficult people) and how to share information (newsletters, proforma documents, database of carers). One respondent was unsure of what they would want to see in terms of peer support, and one stated that it should be BCT with oversight of bat workers guidance and support.

Would you be willing to take on responsibility for enforcing best practice (including vaccination status checks for those regularly handling bats), as regional helplines on the Bat Care Network currently do?

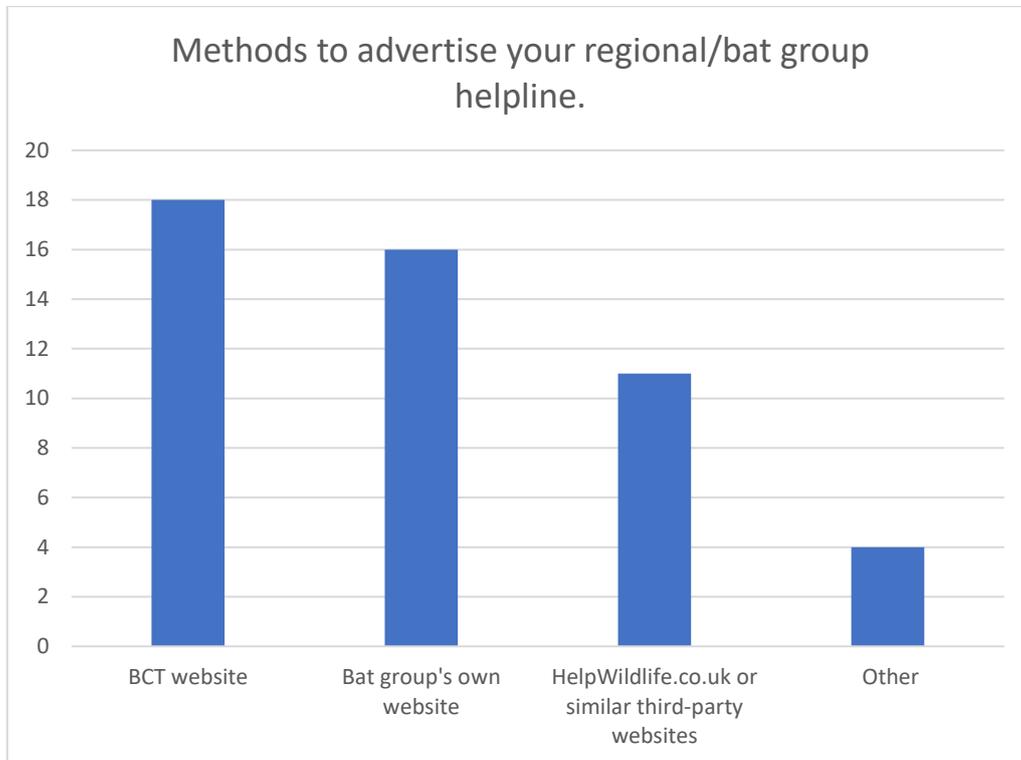
Only four respondents would be willing to take on responsibility for enforcing best practice, 12 said no.

Which of the following routes would you want to use to let the public know about your regional/bat group helpline? Tick all that would apply:

Eighteen people answered this question, and most ticked multiple boxes. This shows a preference for information to be shared as widely as possible so that any finder can access a carer if needed.

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The four answers from those that answered 'Other' were the RSPCA website, local rescue centres, vet surgeries, other wildlife organisations, vets, libraries, citizens advice bureaux, RSPCA, local nature reserves, local authority offices, pest controllers (Local Authority and the commercial firms) and 'all the others that don't spring to mind immediately'. And the final comment was focused on social media, Google, Facebook and YouTube.



What, if any, concerns do you have about making your regional/bat group helpline details publicly available?

Of the 15 respondents, six said they had no worry. Three are concerned about private phone numbers being made publicly available. The other six concerns are listed below:

- Expenses and time
- Time involved to man it
- Volunteer carer numbers
- Overworked people
- Overworked people, technology failure, volunteer call handler numbers.
- Hoax calls wasting time, finders from other areas

There are some clear concerns over privacy, capacity, and people's mental health.

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Are there any other comments that you wish to make about bat care calls being taken entirely by regional/bat group helplines rather than BCT?

Out of those 26 individuals who decided to comment further, the majority used the opportunity to voice the following comments. We have summarised the comments below: For example:

Comments
I don't believe there is anyone in certain areas of [locally] that would do this.
I'm not entirely convinced [this] is a strong viable solution
Requires a big time commitment of carers, especially during the summer
Accuracy of information being gathered and relayed may not be as concise. Potential closure of regional helplines could lead to large area of bat rescue uncovered.
The bats will suffer more, people will not go out or just be forgotten about, giving members of the public the impression that no one cares about the bats in this county.

Bat Groups

Regional/Bat Group Helpline in their area

Of 24 bat groups that answered the survey, eight do have a regional/bat group helpline in their area. Those eight were asked if they would provide advice and/or support to new local or regional helplines being set up: four would, one would but only locally, three would not with one of those groups saying they felt they do not have enough experience to do so. Two bat groups would cooperate or create partnerships with bat groups they share borders with. It should also be mentioned that the groups already help bats across their own regional borders occasionally.

There are 16 bat groups that do not have a regional/bat group helpline in their area. Twelve groups cited capacity as a barrier to setting up a helpline. In most cases this was a lack of volunteers with the time, willingness or expertise required to take the lead on setting up a group or answering calls while two groups mentioned that their members prefer to focus on other bat conservation activities. Some groups raised concerns around the practicalities of running a helpline as a barrier, for example cost, and potential issues that may arise from having a rigid system where certain numbers were available at certain times where a more flexible approach is preferred. Four groups did describe their methods of taking cases centrally and then distributing them among the group, for example web query forms which are circulated to relevant volunteers and the use of WhatsApp groups to share the workload, though none of these groups consider these methods to constitute a regional helpline. There are three bat groups that used to have a regional/bat group helpline which ceased operating. Two groups explained that their helpline numbers were replaced with online systems which has helped relieve the pressure that the helplines were creating for members. One disbanded helpline constituted just one volunteer, which was again closed due to the stress and time commitment of this role.

Setting up a regional helpline

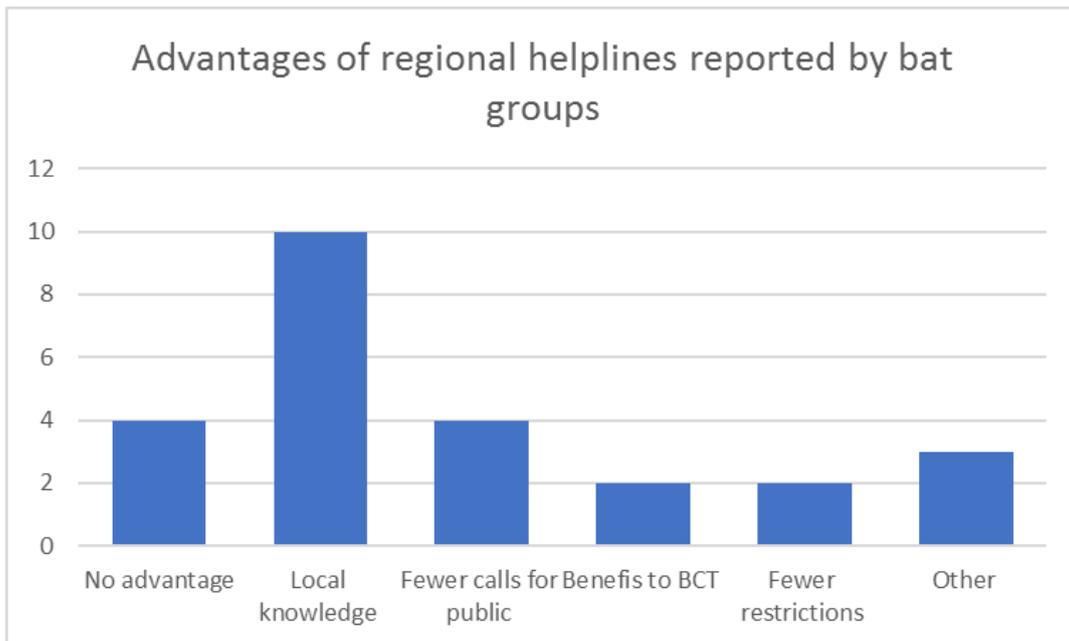
All bat groups were asked if they would consider working with neighbouring bat groups to set up a regional helpline covering a larger area, four said they would, two said maybe, three did not answer. The remaining 15 bat groups said they would not.

Those six groups who would consider working with neighbouring groups to set up or maintain a regional/bat group helpline were asked what support they would like from BCT. Two groups answered, one group was unsure of the support they'd need, as they would prefer to continue using their current method of sharing bat calls. The other group mentioned that they would need to work more closely with neighbouring bat groups but clarified that they would not want to do this as part of a larger regional helpline. None of the six groups that would consider working with neighbouring groups suggested any form of peer support from fellow volunteer helplines. None of the respondents (of which there were two to this question) would be willing to take on responsibility for enforcing best practice as regional helplines on the UK Bat Care Network currently do. These six groups were also asked which routes they would want to use to let the public know about their regional/bat group helpline; two groups opted for the BCT website, one group also selected the bat group's own website and HelpWildlife.co.uk or similar third-party websites.

Bat groups were asked to raise concerns about making their helpline details publicly available. One group raised concerns about the pressure this would put on individuals to answer calls at all hours of the day, and also about the possibility of increased cold calls having the number publicly available. The other group did not feel able to comment at this stage.

Advantages and disadvantages of a regional/bat group helpline

We asked groups to outline the advantages of a regional/bat group helpline. Twenty-one groups gave examples of advantages, with some groups providing multiple examples. The majority (10) of the advantages cited referred to the benefits of a helpline being local, with eight groups recognising that this would bring greater knowledge of regional differences, such as the geographical area and carer availability, and greater access to non-Network support from other members of the bat group and wildlife friendly vets. Two groups also cited the advantage of being able to store local bat records, which they consider to be helpful in identifying problem roosts, etc. Four groups cited benefits to bat finders in that they would need to make fewer phone calls to access help, particularly if the regional helpline also provides other functions such as roost information and support. Other advantages mentioned just once or twice include using this as an opportunity to recruit more volunteers to existing regional helplines, making it easier for groups to forward bat calls to neighbouring carers if they also had helplines, the ability to operate with fewer restrictions than BCT's Helpline currently has (e.g. hours of operation), and benefits to BCT. Three of the responding groups could see no advantages of a regional/bat group helpline.



We also asked groups to outline the disadvantages of a regional/bat group helpline. All 24 groups answered this section, some of whom provided multiple examples. Eighteen of the responses refer to issues resourcing a regional helpline as being a key disadvantage, with a lack of available volunteers, time, or expertise in maintaining a helpline being a common theme. Some groups reflected on the running of a helpline being too onerous a task on just a few people, and two groups were particularly concerned with the sustainability of this option for the reasons mentioned. Three groups raised the patchy or inconsistent advice to the public which could arise from moving toward regional helplines as a key disadvantage, particularly when it comes to rabies best practice for the public, and one group mentioned that taking on legal liability for this advice as a disadvantage. Three groups mentioned that regional groups may cause confusion for the public who may not understand regional boundaries or call groups outside of their area. Two groups mentioned the cost and lack of infrastructure for sending cases out to carers as a disadvantage. Three of the responding groups could see no disadvantages of a regional/bat group helpline.

Bat group members interested in helping a regional/bat group helpline

Bat groups were asked if there are any bat group members that are not currently involved in bat care but who might be interested in getting involved with the running of a regional/bat group helpline. 14 groups did not know, seven said no, and three said yes. Of those that answered yes, one group mentioned that they are constantly running recruitment drives and training members in bat group activities but did not suggest a number. One group said that this was too difficult to gauge at this stage. The third group has two volunteers available to take calls, but none to administrate.

Bat groups were also asked if there are any bat group members that are not currently registered with the UK Bat Care Network but who might work with a regional/bat group helpline. 11 groups did not know, five said no, three did not answer, and five said yes. Of those that answered yes, two groups said they already do this, but did not indicate how many individuals this currently was. One group suggested 20 volunteers, another 15-20 volunteers, and a third group would have just one volunteer able to do this.

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Other Comments

Groups were given the opportunity to comment further, the majority used the opportunity to voice further concerns about this as an option. For example:

Comments
We cannot see how we would make it work on a regional number without hardship resting entirely on one person.
We are busy enough...we don't not have the time or volunteers for a wider regional area unfortunately
...we feel that our membership is so small it is unlikely that any members would be willing to volunteer to assist with running a regional helpline
The triage and advice given by BCT/helpline reduces the load on our coordinator. It is very unlikely that she would be able to cope without the helpline being the first point of call.
Some bat finders will not be able to find the number. It relies on heavy advertising/internet – people not in digital poverty
...if this option is chosen it would take a long time to set up and be patchy cover so would have to run alongside another option as well.
It has been very difficult to get members of this bat group to respond to the consultation so it is unlikely that we could muster the resources for a regional helpline

5. Option 3. Bat Finder Details Passed Direct to Carers

5.1 Introduction

This option makes use of a website and/or a smartphone app and each UK Bat Care Network Member would have their own account. The details of how exactly this would work is dependent on the results of this consultation and the software capabilities. For example:

1. The bat finder's details are input into an online system (either directly on BCT's website where guidance about rabies and properly containing bats can be found, or by a volunteer call handler who will explain this advice).
2. When a bat needs help in a member's area, the carers for whom the bat is within their working radius receive an alert with full details, for example in the app, by e-mail or by text.
3. A carer or ambulance driver would accept the case using the software.
4. Once a Network Member has accepted a care call, the others get a message advising they're no longer needed.
5. If no carer accepts a call within two hours for emergencies (we currently use the 'PIPS' acronym to determine emergency calls: Predated, Injured (in a way obvious to the finder), Pup, and Stuck to something.) or five hours for non-emergencies, the finder will be advised to take the bat to a vet.
6. Carers would manage their accounts independently and change their availability, radius, or personal details at any time themselves. Carers would receive rabies vaccination reminders automatically.

This section was aimed at UK Bat Care Network members only, but bat groups were given the option to comment. These comments have been collated with those on option 4 under section 6.

5.2 Summary of results

The majority of respondents (39 out of 50) would be happy to use an online system or app where bat finders' details were passed to Network members, however the overall feedback on using a system like this was mixed with a number of important advantages and risks being raised.

When asked about barriers, 21 respondents stated that there would be barriers to using an online system, the main one being a lack of mobile or internet signal. Attitude towards technology was also a factor, with those who were unfamiliar with or disliked using up-to-date technology such as email and smartphone apps tending to prefer their current set up. Whereas those who were more comfortable with using technology within or outside of bat care tended to be more positive.

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Another additional barrier mentioned was financial constraints related to purchasing and using devices such as smartphones or tablets. When asked, the majority of respondents did have access to good internet (39) and mobile service (33) in their area; however it is important to note that a number of respondents did not have access to good service (11 and 17 respectively).

Preference on what device the systems interface was on and how notifications would be received varied so it is likely any system created would need to have a variety of options available. However, a smartphone app and web-based approach was favoured as well as text notifications.

Having more control over availability and preferences was seen as a big advantage to an online system. The majority of respondents (43) gave multiple answers when given options for how they could control availability and preferences. Setting your own availability was the most common control wanted, however every option was selected by multiple respondents, showing that having a variety of options would be beneficial for Network members. A variety of hours were also given for when Network members wished to receive notifications, with having the option to set their own 'Do Not Disturb' period being the most popular response. Respondents also fed back that when they would like to receive notifications varies on a daily basis, highlighting that there is no set 'working hours' for bat care so flexibility is important when thinking about setting up controls such as availability.

When asked about what information and/or checks should be included on an online form used by bat finders, the majority of respondents felt that the current information and checks carried out by BCT staff and VBCH volunteers should be maintained. It came across that most importantly, for creating a usable and informative online form, was providing as many descriptive and visual aids as possible.

The most cited advantages of this system referred to the benefits of speeding up the time it takes for a bat to receive care and improving the journey of the bat finder. Another important advantage was the potential for this system to aid in the management of bat care requests and put more control in the hands of Network members in terms of availability and preferences. It was felt that including this kind of functionality could ease the pressure of bat care and even potentially help in the coordination of bat care if Network members were able to communicate via the online system in some way. On the other hand, the most cited disadvantages of this system referred to accessibility issues for those that are unable to use newer technologies and those that don't have internet or mobile service. There were also concerns about whether an online form would be informative enough for bat finders.

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5.3 Analysis of results

UK Bat Care Network Members

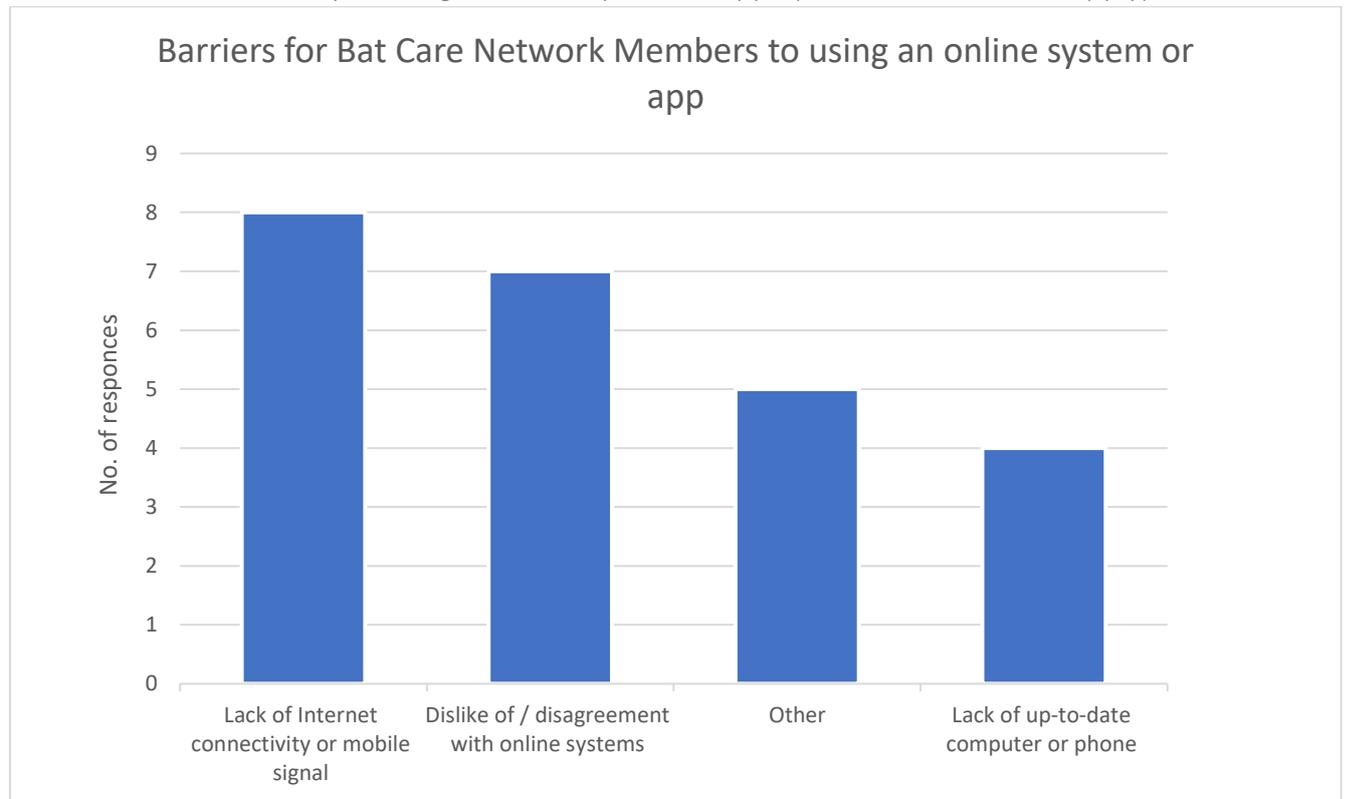
Would you be comfortable using an online system or app to receive requests from members of the public? (The finder would not be given your contact details in this scenario. Only their details would be provided to you via the website/app.)

Of all respondents asked 39 said yes and 10 said no. One was left blank.

Are there any barriers to you using an online system or app?

Of all respondents asked 21 said yes and 29 said no.

What are the barriers to you using an online system or app? (Please select all that apply)



Please let us know if there are any adjustments that could be made to make an online system or app usable.

No answers given.

Please would you briefly explain the other barrier to using an online system or app?

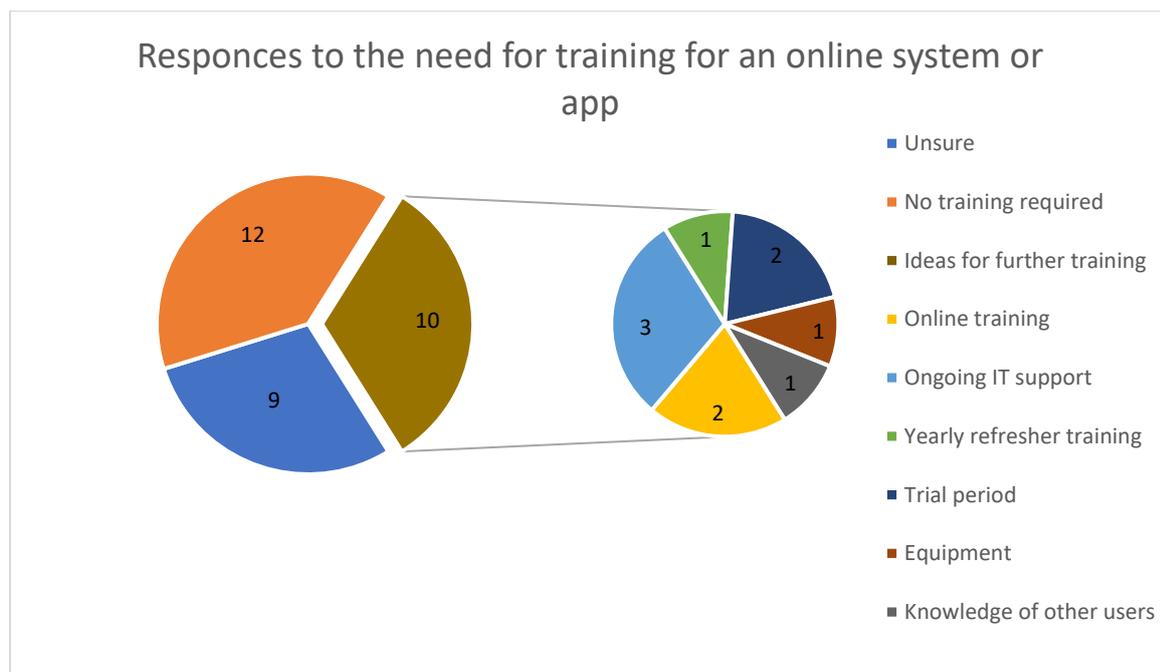
Eight respondents answered this question. Three responses were disadvantages to using an online system so have been included under the relevant question below. Three responses mentioned that they would not be able to monitor an online system as closely as their current set-up, for example, voicemails left on a landline could be checked more frequently than notifications on a laptop. One response gave financial constraints as a barrier, the purchase of mobile data or new equipment such as smart phones could be unaffordable for some Network members. One respondent felt that an online system would not be as good

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as their current set-up and that the time and effort required to change the way they handle bat care enquiries would be a barrier.

We would provide instructions in the use of the online system or app. What other support or training might you require?

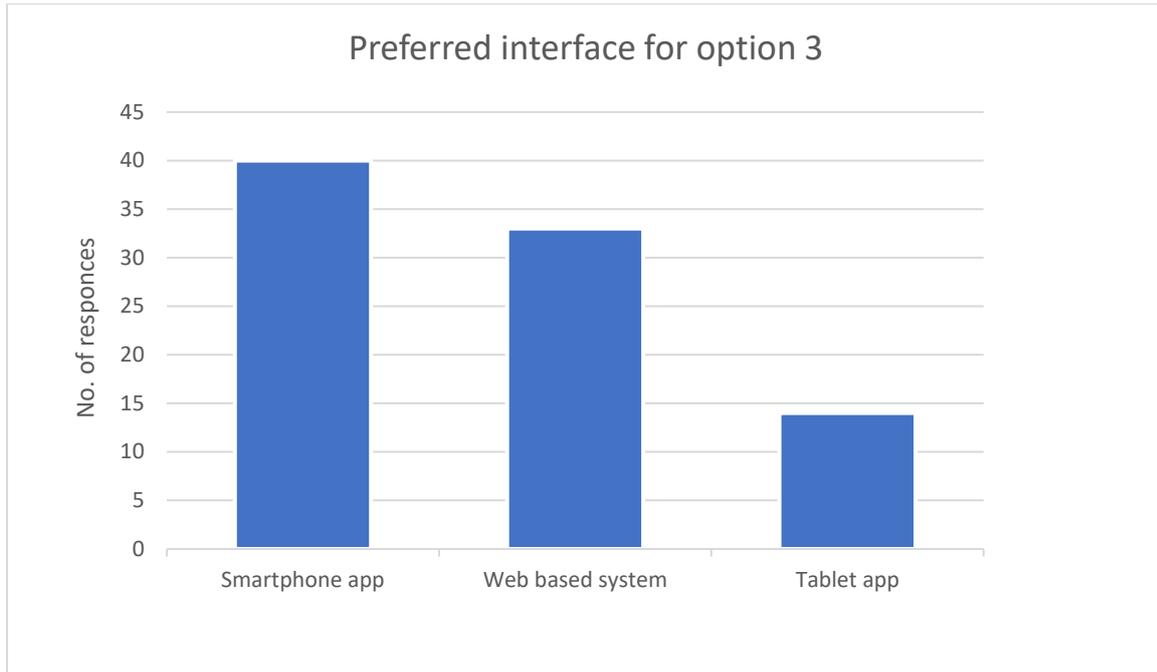
This question was answered by 41 respondents and a range of answers were provided. Ten answers were comments relating to disadvantages of an online system so have been included under the relevant question below. Twelve respondents stated that they would not require further training beyond instructions on how to use the online system or app. Nine respondents stated that they were unsure at this point on what support they would need and would require further details on the actual system before suggesting required support. Ten respondents provided ideas for further training which included online training sessions, yearly refresher training, ongoing technical support and having a chance to trial the system ahead of it rolling out. It was also suggested BCT provide devices for those that do not have access to up-to-date technology. Another point made was that it would be helpful for Network members to have information on who else is using the online system or app to help them judge if they would be the best person to respond to the request.



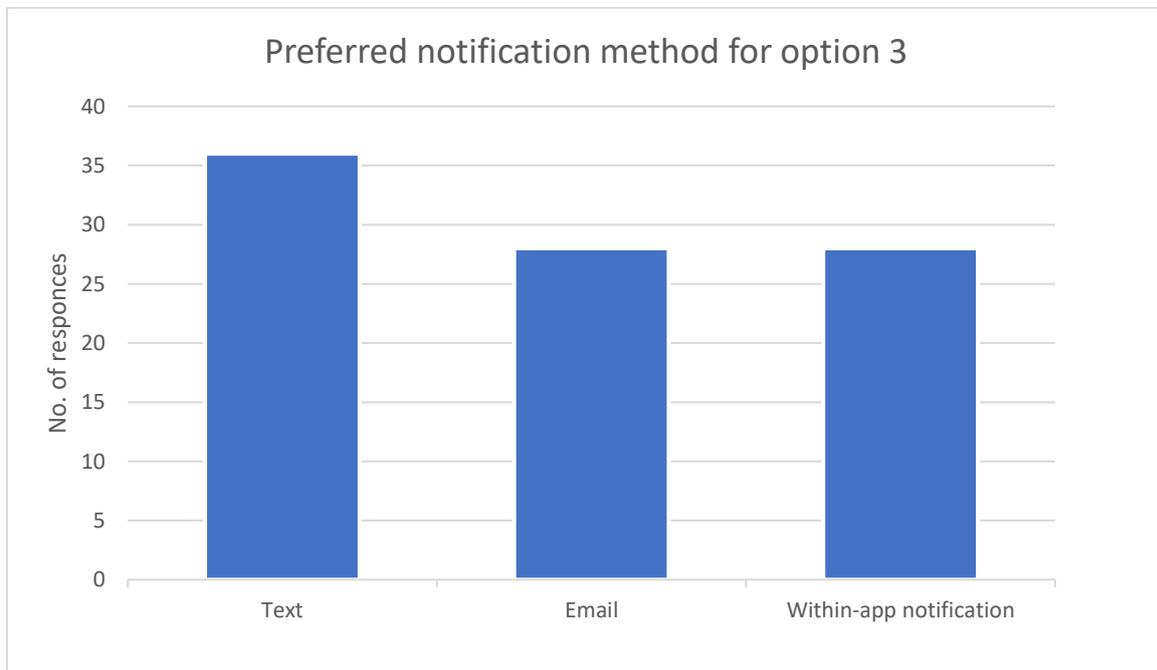
What sort of interface would you be happy to use? (Choose all that apply)

This question gave people options to choose from and was answered by 49 respondents, with 29 respondents giving multiple answers. When tallied, 40 respondents would be happy to use a smartphone app, 33 respondents would be happy with a web-based system and 14 would be happy with a tablet app.

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How would you like to receive notifications of bats in your area? (Choose all that apply)
This question was answered by 50 respondents, with 30 respondents giving multiple answers. When tallied 36 respondents would like to receive notifications from the online system or app by text, 28 respondents would like to receive notifications by email and 28 would be like notifications by within-app notifications.

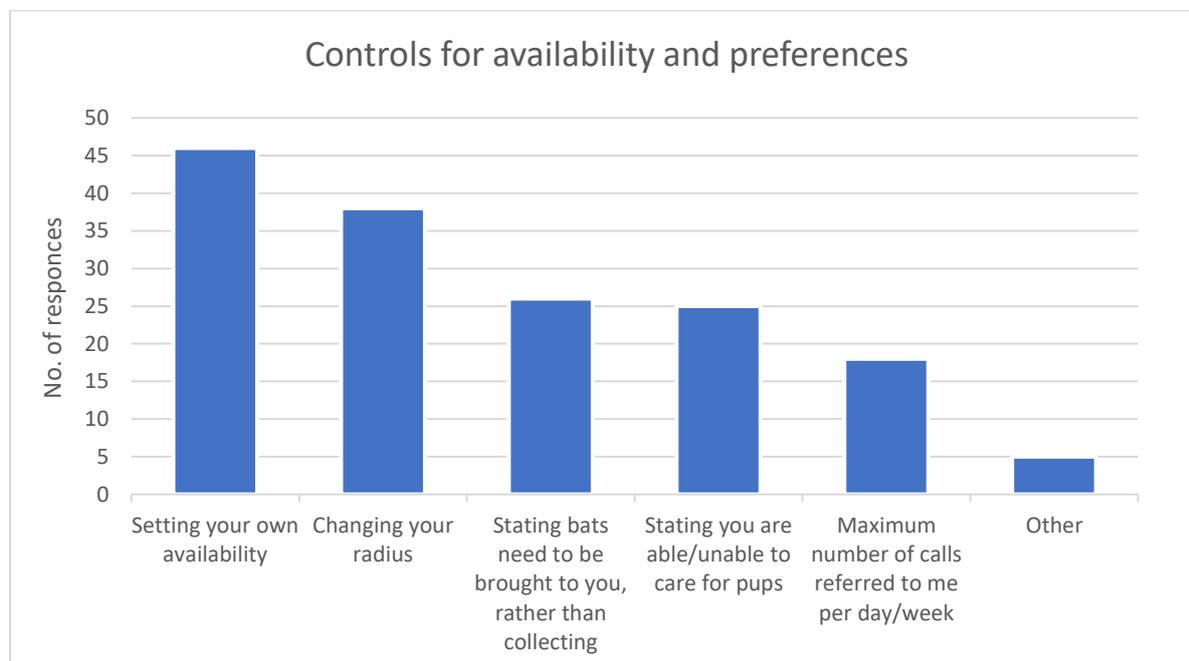


What controls would you want over your availability and preferences in an online system where finder details were passed to you?

This question was answered by 50 respondents, with 43 respondents giving multiple answers. When tallied 46 respondents would like to be able to set their own availability, 38 respondents would like to be able to change their radius, 26 respondents would like to be

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able to state they need bats to be brought to them, 25 respondents would like to be able to state they are able/unable to take pups, 18 respondents would like to set a maximum number of calls per day/week and five respondents included other preferences they would like to be able to control.



Please explain the other additional controls you would want.

Six respondents added additional comments in 'other', for controls over availability and preferences. Two were responses relating to disadvantages of an online system so have been included under the relevant question below. Two responses were suggestions on additional functionality and considerations which have been included under question 4.18. One response was about informing bat finders so has been included under question 4.13. One response was relating to option 4 so has been moved to question 5.5.

What do you see as the advantages of a system whereby bat finders' details are passed directly to carers via an online system or app?

This question was answered by 42 respondents. Their responses are summarised as follows:

Comment	Count
Could reduce the amount of time it takes for bats to receive the care they need.	8
Could make the journey for the bat finder more efficient and pleasant.	8
Could improve the management of bat care requests if the functionality was included, e.g. can show request as pending or completed.	7
This option puts more control in the hands of bat carers in terms of availability and preferences which would make managing requests more satisfactory.	5
Could make incoming requests more convenient and easier to manage/respond to e.g., compared to phone calls which can be disruptive.	5

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If there was a function to communicate with other users, it could allow carers in local areas to work together to make sure coverage is at its optimal and that requests are picked up.	3
Bat carers will have control of their contact details rather than having them available online therefore this is a much safer option in terms of data protection.	3
Accurate recording of bat finder's contact details.	3
Less labour intensive for BCT and is not reliant on the availability of volunteers to answer calls.	3
Takes the pressure off bat carers as it allows you to put in restrictions such as can't pick up bats, which can be hard to say on the phone.	2
This option would help provide flexibility to when you can and can't take on requests.	1
An online system would mean that rules around radiuses would be followed better, compared to using volunteers, so would remove the likelihood of requests being sent outside of a carers radius.	1
Bat finders have to provide sufficient information to start with so would make flow of communication and information easier.	1
Appealing to younger generations of bat carers and bat finders.	1
Would make it quicker to see how far away the bat is.	1
Initial assessment would be made by bat carers, who have first-hand experience rather than volunteers who may not.	1
With this system there is an opportunity for further educational information to be provided to bat finders automatically.	1
If used alongside other options, this would improve the choices for bat finders to help bats and also improve accessibility.	1
If internet calling or emails functionality included this would help bat finders who are in areas with poor reception.	1
Most bat finders find Helpline's number on the internet so it can be assumed most will have internet access.	1
Modernises the bat care system and improves longevity.	1

What do you see as the disadvantages of a system whereby bat finders' details are passed directly to carers via an online system or app?

41 respondents answered this question and their responses are summarised as follows:

Comment	Count
Not accessible for bat carers and bat finders that are unable to use new technology or access new technology.	8
This system is reliant on an internet connection/mobile signal which is not available to everyone.	6
May be harder to ensure bat finders have read and understood the instructions correctly which could impact the reliability of the information inputted into the online system e.g. not able to identify a baby bat, or misunderstanding containment advice, putting in the wrong location.	6
Data protection risks.	5

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This option is not as good as a bat finder talking to a person e.g., BCT staff or volunteer.	4
There could be a risk that carers miss notifications, so bats have to wait longer to receive care.	4
This system puts more responsibility on bat carers to call the bat finder. This may lead to more work for the carer if the bat finder doesn't pick up straight away.	4
Risk of technical issues causing disruptions and issues.	4
Not suitable for carers that don't regularly access emails or devices that can receive notifications.	3
The online system sticking to radius rules more strictly than volunteers could lead to bats falling outside any carers radius.	3
An online system is too inflexible. Although I have preferences, I will change them depending on the situation e.g. may go out and pick up a bat if it is serious.	3
If there isn't the functionality or option to know what other local carers are doing, there will be issues with requests not being dealt with and bat care not being handled in an optimized way.	2
May lead to an increase in volume of requests.	2
An online system that sends notifications to a mobile could cause burn out as it can be harder to step back from mobiles then emails/voicemail.	2
Local carers may all be busy at the same time and not be able to get back to bat finders within 2 hours, e.g. they all work usual hours.	1
More cost on carers as they must call rather than receiving calls.	1
This option may be reliant on devices which you could forget or not charge etc.	1
Could lead to impatience from bat finders who expect immediate response.	1
Bat finders won't know if their request has been seen by anyone, compared to giving them a number to call.	1
No direct contact with BCT so missing opportunity to engage and educate.	1
Bat finders could 'game' the system to get bat carers outside of their radius.	1
Location would not be accurate if person travels a lot for work or carries out field work.	1
Could lead to more bats going to vets.	1
Could isolate bat carers by making bat care an online solitary activity	1
Could lead to a fragmentation of bat care records	1

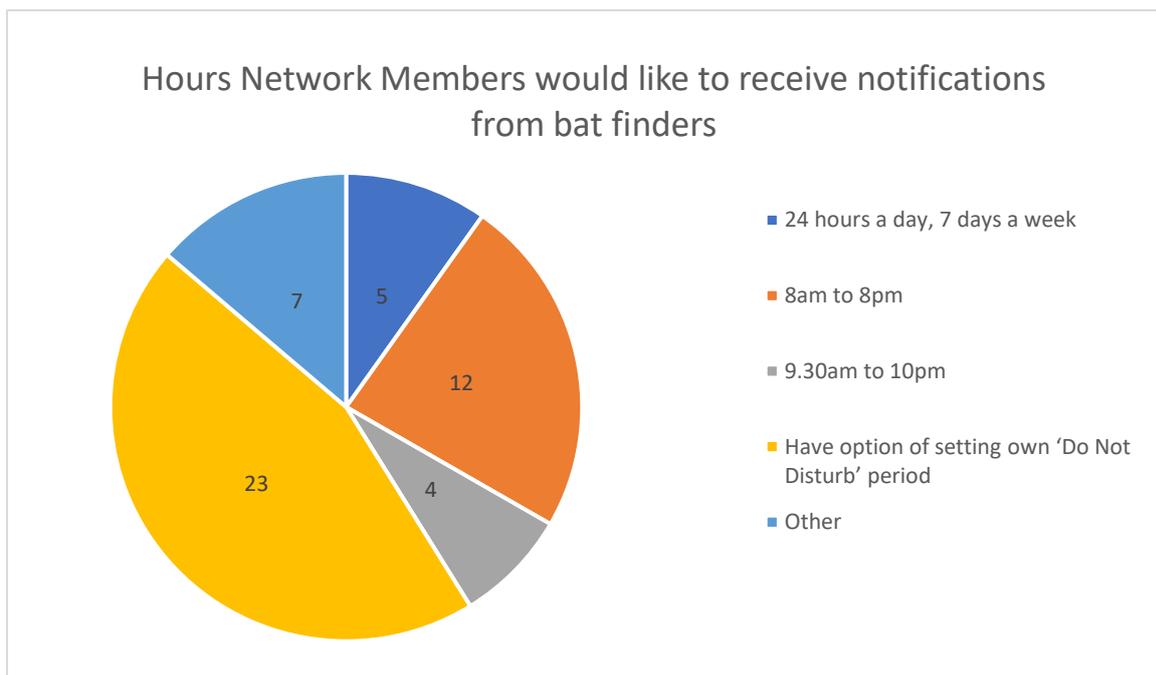
What sort of information and/or checks would you need for bat finders to have seen/understood before their details get passed on to you (e.g. containment advice, bat already contained, etc.)?

This question was answered by 49 respondents. Majority of respondents felt the current checks and information given by volunteers to bat finders was sufficient and should be maintained if we were to move to an online system. A number of respondents felt it was

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important to provide information on how to securely contain a bat to reduce the likelihood of bats escaping before they reach care. Another important piece of information for bat finders was instructions on how to identify if a bat was dead vs alive and a pup vs an adult. Photos, descriptions, and videos were suggested as helpful ways to explain the differences. Questions relating to COVID-19 health and safety were also mentioned by several respondents. One respondent highlighted that the way Network members carry out bat care varies which would impact what checks different Network members would prefer to be applied.

In a system where finders details are passed to you, during what hours would you wish to be able to receive notifications from bat finders?



Please explain what the other hours are that you would wish to be able to receive notifications from bat finders?

Ten respondents added additional comments in other, for when they would like to receive notifications from bat finders. Although six respondents gave set hours, they would like to receive notifications, most respondents felt that the hours they would like to receive notifications were variable and that being able to switch off notifications when they wanted to would be important.

Do you have access to good internet service in your area?

Of all respondents asked 39 said yes and 11 said no.

Do you have access to good mobile service in your area?

Of all respondents asked 33 said yes and 17 said no.

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Are there any other comments that you wish to make about bat finders' contact details being passed directly to carers rather than via BCT?

Seventeen respondents provided extra comments, six were responses relating to disadvantages of an online system so have been included under the relevant question above.

Comment

If no one is available to take the bat (after 2 or 5 hours), how will the bat finder be notified?

Concerned about the lack of supervision and accountability.

It's common for bat carers to work together so it's important for that communication to be retained if BCT moved to something like option 3.

It would be nice to have a 'Do Not Disturb' option.

Even if this option is not adopted, it would be nice to have the functionality to change availability without having to email the bat care coordinator.

It would be good to communicate with bat finders through the app rather than using personal numbers.

If bat carers become the first-person bat finders speak to, it could lead to an increase in bat carers having to deal with more work such as bat bites, roost issues etc.

It would be good if bat finders could upload images of the bat, if they have them, for the care to see.

Don't use the term pups as most members of the public can't age bats and may lead to adult bats not receiving care

Difficult to get this system to fit with bat carers who use a landline system

Instead of using radius use postcodes you can cover. Radius assumes travel is easy in all direction.

6. Option 4. Carer Details Made Available Direct to Bat Finders

6.1 Introduction

This would operate on a similar basis to Option 3. except that instead of the bat finder's details being passed to carers and ambulance drivers, the details of local carers and ambulance drivers would be passed to the bat finder. Again, the details of how exactly this would work is dependent on the results of this consultation and the software capabilities. For example:

1. Bat finders use an online system, most likely hosted on the BCT website, to input their details and the location of the bat.
2. Here, they will find the contact details of up to three nearby carers/ambulance drivers, possibly based on postcode (as the Helpline currently does with bat care calls), grid reference, or some other method.
3. The bat finder will then contact the carers in list order (as they currently do when Helpline volunteers take bat care calls).
4. The bat finder will be advised that when there are no contact details available, or if no carer accepts a call within two hours for emergencies (we currently use the 'PIPS' acronym to determine emergency calls: Predated, Injured (in a way obvious to the finder), Pup, and Stuck to something.) or five hours for non-emergencies, the finder will be advised to take the bat to a vet.
5. Carers would manage their accounts independently and change their availability, radius or personal details at any time themselves. Carers would receive rabies vaccination reminders automatically.

This section was aimed at UK Bat Care Network members only, but bat groups were given the option to comment.

6.2 Summary of results

Most respondents (34 out of 50) would be happy to use an online system or app where Network members' details were passed to bat finders. However, the overall feedback was mixed, and data security was raised as a serious risk.

Like option 3, it was clear that having more control over availability and preferences was something Network members would like to see. Most respondents (37) gave multiple answers when given the options for controls on availability and preferences. Setting your own availability was the most common control wanted, however every option was selected by multiple respondents, showing that having a variety of options would be beneficial for Network members. A variety of hours were selected for when Network members wished to receive notifications, with having the option to set their own 'Do Not Disturb' period being the most popular response. Respondents also fed back that when they would like to receive

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notifications varies daily, highlighting that there is no set 'working hours' for bat care so flexibility is important when thinking about setting up controls such as availability.

When asked about what information and/or checks should be included on an online form used by bat finders, most respondents felt that the current information and checks carried out by BCT staff and VBCH volunteers should be maintained. It came across that most importantly, for creating a usable and informative online form, was providing as many descriptive and visual aids as possible.

The most cited advantage of this system was providing a more pleasant and efficient journey for bat finders compared to option 3. A number of respondents felt that bat finders would prefer to receive contact details for Network members as soon as possible and that being given numbers to call would be better than waiting to see if a Network member has taken on their request. Another advantage was the fact this option put the responsibility on the bat finder rather than Network members to make the initial phone call. On the other hand, the most cited disadvantages of this system referred to the data protection risks with having Network members' details online. Making contact details available online increases the risk of nuisance calls, bat finders not following Network members' preferences (e.g., calling outside of the given availability times) and of personal information being compromised, if appropriate security measures are not in place.

Bat Groups were also given the opportunity to provide comments on both options 3 and 4 and in total 13 groups responded. Overall comments received by bat groups reiterated the responses received by Network members. However additional points included the concern that options 3 and 4 could be hard to administer and therefore may lead to Network members forgetting to update things such as availability and that there was a risk Network members could become disconnected from bat groups.

6.3 Analysis of results

UK Bat Care Network Members

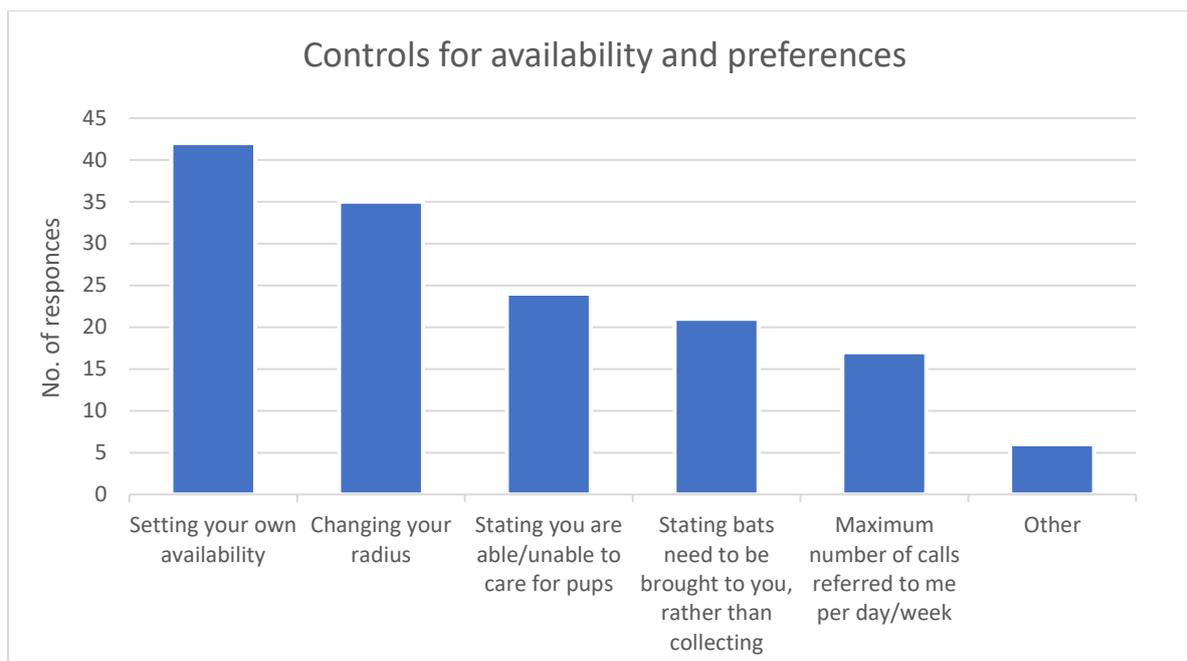
Would you be comfortable with your phone number/contact details being passed to bat finders via an online system or app?

Of all respondents asked 34 said yes and 16 said no.

What controls would you want over your availability and preferences in an online system where your details were passed to finders? (Choose all that apply)

This question was answered by 49 respondents, with 37 respondents giving multiple answers. When tallied 42 respondents would like to be able to set their own availability, 35 respondents would like to be able to change their radius, 21 respondents would like to be able to state they need bats to be brought to them, 24 respondents would like to be able to state they are able/unable to take pups, 17 respondents would like to set a maximum number of calls per day/week and six respondents included other preferences they would like to be able to control.

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Please explain the other additional controls you would want.

Five respondents added additional comments in 'other', for controls over availability and preferences. Four were responses relating to disadvantages of an online system so have been included under the relevant question below. One response suggested that using postcodes instead of a radius would work better at setting the area a Network Member covers.

What do you see as the advantages of a system whereby carers' and ambulance drivers' contact details are passed directly to bat finders via an online system or app?

A total of 39 respondents provided comments, four were responses relating to disadvantages of an online system so have been included under the relevant question below. One was a general comment so has been included with other general comments further on in this section.

Comment	Count
Would make the journey for the bat finder more efficient and pleasant, as this option would be faster than option 3.	11
Puts responsibility onto bat finder rather than bat carer to make the phone call.	9
Would reduce the amount of time bats have to wait for care.	2
Less change required of bat carers as this is closer to the current system where carers details are given out.	2
Less labour intensive for BCT	2
Not reliant on the availability of volunteers to answer calls.	2
This option gives the bat carer more autonomy.	1
No need to check an app unlike option 3, so not reliant on carers internet/mobile signal.	1
This option isn't reliant on carers needing access to up-to-date technology.	1
Less complicated than option 3.	1

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If used alongside other options, this would improve the choices for the bat finder/ improve accessibility.	1
Most people find the Helpline from the website so most people should have access to the internet to use this system	1
If more than phone number is included, finder can contact through internet/internet calling to avoid areas with poor reception	1
If the carer is unable to help, they can still talk the bat finder through some advice.	1

What do you see as the disadvantages of a system whereby carers' and ambulance drivers' contact details are passed directly to bat finders via an online system or app?

The extra comments provided by 40 respondents may be summarised as follows:

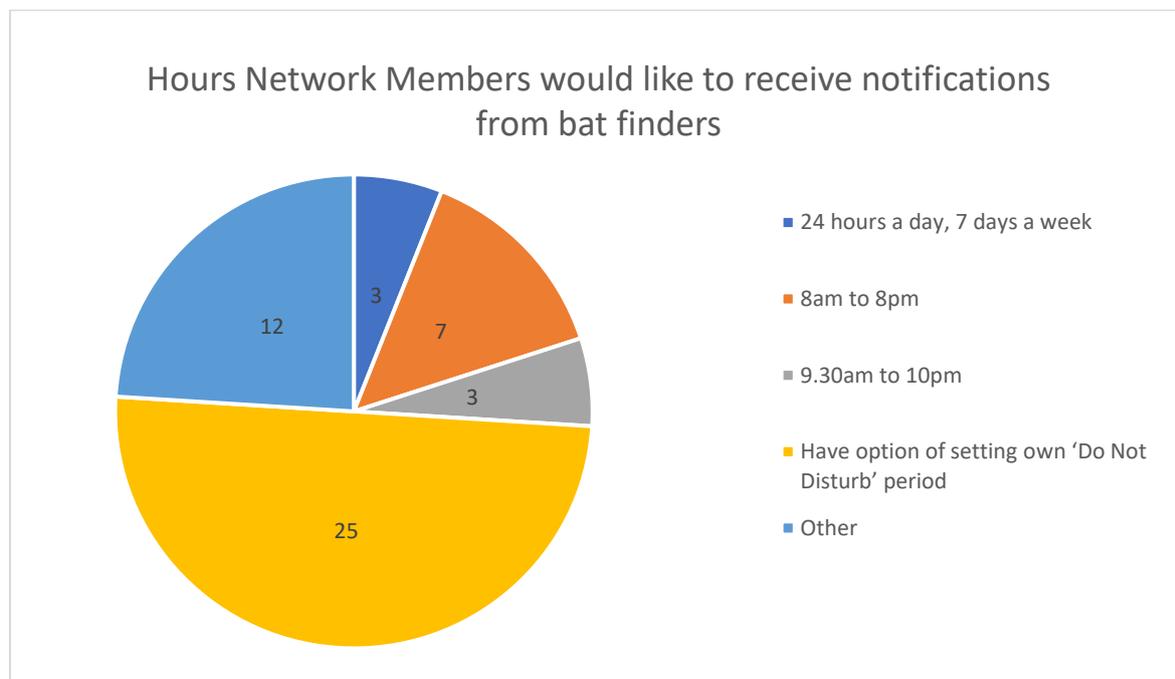
Comment	Count
Data protection risks with having bat carer's contact details online.	14
Local carers may all be busy at the same time and not be able to get back to bat finders within 2 hours, e.g., they all work usual hours.	5
Risk of multiple carers being contacted resulting in a duplication of effort.	4
Bat finders not following the preferences of bat carers.	4
This system is reliant on an internet connection/mobile signal which is not available to everyone.	4
Some bat carers may get contacted more than others.	3
Not accessible for bat carers and bat finders that are unable to use new technology or access new technology.	2
This option may be reliant on devices which you could forget or not charge etc.	2
An online system is too inflexible. Although I have preferences, I will change them depending on the situation e.g., may go out and pick up a bat if it is serious.	2
No buffer between bat finder and bat carer compared to current system.	1
Bat finders not following online advice e.g., containment.	1
At busy times of the season, it helps to know that at least some of the calls have already been vetted by BCT staff/ volunteers.	1
It still puts the responsibility on bat finders to call several people, and they may be reluctant to do this.	1
Disadvantage of carers details being passed on before they have decided to take on the call.	1
May be harder to ensure bat finders have read and understood the instructions correctly which could impact the reliability of the information inputted into the online system e.g., not able to identify a baby bat, or misunderstanding containment advice, putting in the wrong location.	1
Could isolate bat carers by making bat care an online solitary activity	1
Could lead to impatience from bat finders who expect immediate response.	1
There could be a risk that carers miss notifications/ calls, so bats have to wait longer to receive care.	1

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What sort of information and/or checks would you need for bat finders to have seen/understood before your phone number/contact details get passed on to them (e.g. containment advice, bat already contained, rabies advice, voluntary nature of the service, etc.)?

This question was answered by 46 respondents. Majority of respondents felt the current checks and information given by volunteers to bat finders was sufficient and should be maintained if we were to move to an online system. A number of respondents felt it was important to provide information on how to securely contain a bat to reduce the likelihood of bats escaping before they reach care. Another important piece of information for bat finders was instructions on how to identify if a bat was dead vs alive and a pup vs an adult. Photos, descriptions, and videos were suggested as helpful ways to explain the differences. Questions relating to COVID-19 health and safety were also mentioned by several respondents.

In a system where your details are passed to finders, during what hours would you wish to be able to receive notifications from the finders?



Please explain what the other hours are that you would wish to be able to receive notifications from bat finders?

Nine respondents added additional comments in 'other', for when they would like to receive notifications from bat finders. Although five respondents gave set hours, they would like to receive notifications, most respondents felt that the hours they would like to receive notifications were variable and that being able to switch off notifications when they wanted to would be important.

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Are there any other comments that you wish to make about carers and ambulance drivers contact details being passed directly to members of the public via an online system or app? Extra comments were provided by 18 respondents, nine were responses relating to disadvantages of an online system and one response related to advantages of an online system so those have been included under the relevant questions above.

Comment

Need to make sure that healthy bats are advised to be released.

There is a real risk of nuisance calls, with putting bat carer's contact details online as this is more in the open than the current system.

May lose carers who do not want to take on calls without the current level of screening currently being used.

It would be handy to have the option to receive texts rather than calls particularly when carers are working and may not be able to take calls instantly.

System would need to be flexible enough to handle differences in bat carers methods/preferences.

If bat carers become the first-person bat finders speak to, it could lead to an increase in bat carers having to deal with more work such as bat bites, roost issues etc.

I would be nice to have a 'Do Not Disturb' option.

Even if this option is not adopted, it would be nice to have the functionality to change availability without having to email the bat care coordinator.

Bat Groups

We gave bat groups an option to provide comments from a bat groups perspective on options 3 and 4, with 13 taking the opportunity to do so. Their comments are summarised as follows:

Comment

Concerned about safety issues of having location information of bat carers publicly available.

Concerned that multiple carers could unknowingly be responding to the same call creating duplication of effort.

Concerned that the public could 'game' the system trying different postcodes to generate contacts.

Concerned calls could come through at unsociable hours.

This could further disconnect carers from bat groups.

Concerned this would be difficult to administer, i.e. the carer remembering to say when they're not available.

It could give the impression that more people are available than are.

Option 4 puts a lot of responsibility on the bat finder, which they might not like.

A lot of bat carers would stop being on the Network if option 3 or 4 was chosen.

Lack of IT infrastructure and privacy issues would discourage bat carers.

Moving to this system would require changing the way bat care is managed, which would be a negative.

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It may not always be possible for carers to respond as quickly as required and without a member of the public being in touch with a BCT volunteer or staff member, could create a negative attitude towards bat conservation.

Preferred option out of the two is for bat finder details to be passed to bat carers as this doesn't involve having bat carer details publicly available.

7. UK Bat Care Network Support

7.1 Introduction

Irrespective of what happens in terms of the four options covered by this consultation, we wanted to get feedback on the resources and support that BCT currently provides for members of the UK Bat Care Network. The bat group respondents also had the opportunity to comment. The aim of this section is to ensure we can be better informed when making changes to the resources provided regarding bat care. A total of 50 UK Bat Carers gave answers to this section of the questionnaire, and six bat groups gave their opinions of the support provided by BCT.

7.2 Summary of results

The responses are outlined below per question. To summarise the section, the resources produced by BCT are valued by the UK Bat Care Network members, and many of the respondents use what is produced. Resources provided by the wider network are also used and valued, the multi-pronged approach to support and education works well for the UK Bat Care Network respondents.

Over half (54%) of the respondents have sought support for bat care related matters, the most cited matters are vaccinations, rabies, and COVID-19. For this type of advice bat carers most frequently got in touch via email, then through a telephone call. Most stated that the advice was either extremely helpful or very helpful, further explaining that BCT was able to provide answers and support based on the situations that arose. No respondents provided negative feedback to the support provided by the BCT on bat care related matters. Overall this suggests that the advice, support, and guidance provided by BCT via email, phone, on the website, and through the Bat Care Bulletin Blog is invaluable and increases confidence in the UK Bat Care Network members.

Bat carers that use the resources and communications produced by BCT find them useful for general updates, rabies advice, bat care news. They find the resources to be accessible, clear, and comprehensive. Of the respondents, 72% read the Bat Care Bulletin Blog and do so within the month of being notified of a new post. The most frequent answer that respondents gave to not reading the blog is that they forget, followed by lack of time. There are some respondents that are unsure how to access the blog, and comment that it is not well advertised. These are things that can be addressed by the UK Bat Care Network Coordinator at BCT, and that we will be addressing over the coming months.

The bat care resources on the website are also seen as useful, although they are accessed less frequently than the blog. Most respondents (86%) stated that there are no other resources they would like to be provided on the website. Those that would like more resources on the website request for more detail for bat finders, more training for bat carers, access to existing resources, and an FAQ. These suggestions will be further explored by the team at BCT.

We asked several questions outlining useful external resources to the UK Bat Carer Network, these included the Facebook Bat Rehabilitators group, the West Yorkshire Bat Hospital, Bat

Care Manual, BCT's Bat Care Guidelines. The most common resource is the BCT Bat Care Guidelines, followed by the Bat Care Manual, the Facebook Bat Rehabilitators group, and finally the West Yorkshire Bat Hospital.

Other sources of support that are most frequently mentioned are other bat carers. This highlights the strength of the network and the training that occurs for individuals to become a bat carer.

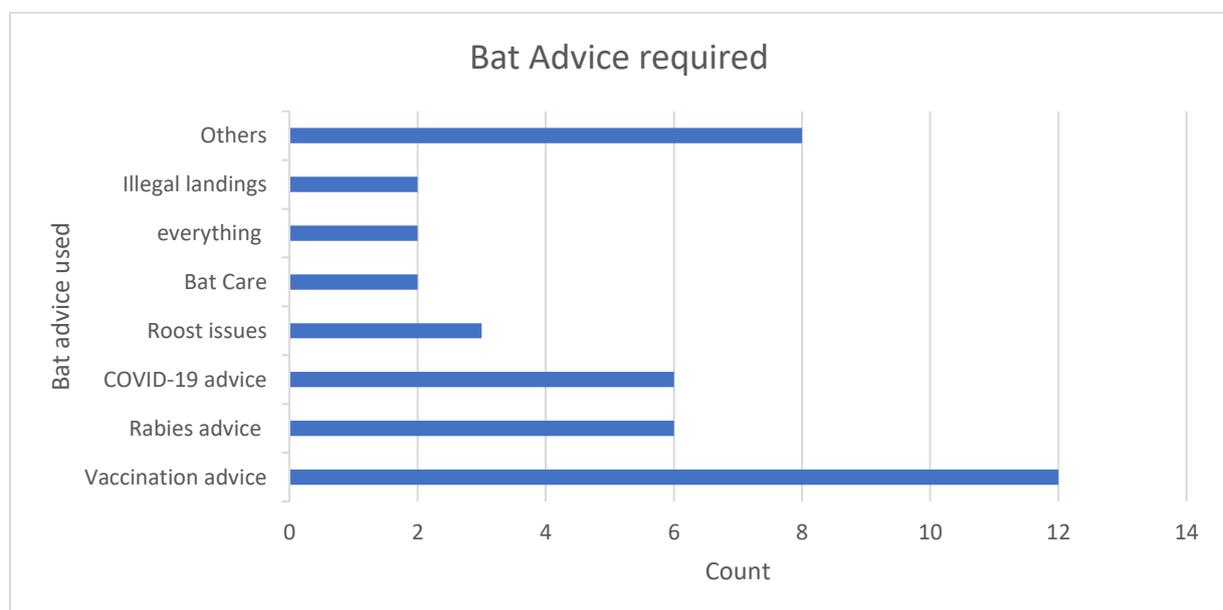
Finally, the comments provided at the end of this section of the questionnaire have been divided in suggestions and comments. This is also the case for the bat group responses to section 6. Generally, the comments are positive about the support provided by BCT in all of its forms. This section has highlighted some areas of improvement such as guidance on pups, improved access and advertising about the Bat Care Bulletin Blog, continued training, and Bat Care Conferences. It has also backed up the efficacy of the resources provided by the BCT and those created by the UK Bat Care Network itself.

7.2 Analysis of results

UK Bat Care Network Members

Have you sought support from BCT on bat care related matters, such as disease risk management guidance, bat care questions, vaccinations?

Of the UK Bat Care Network members' responses, 27 said they had sought advice, whilst 23 had not. We asked the respondents to elaborate on the support they required, and the categories are highlighted in the chart below.

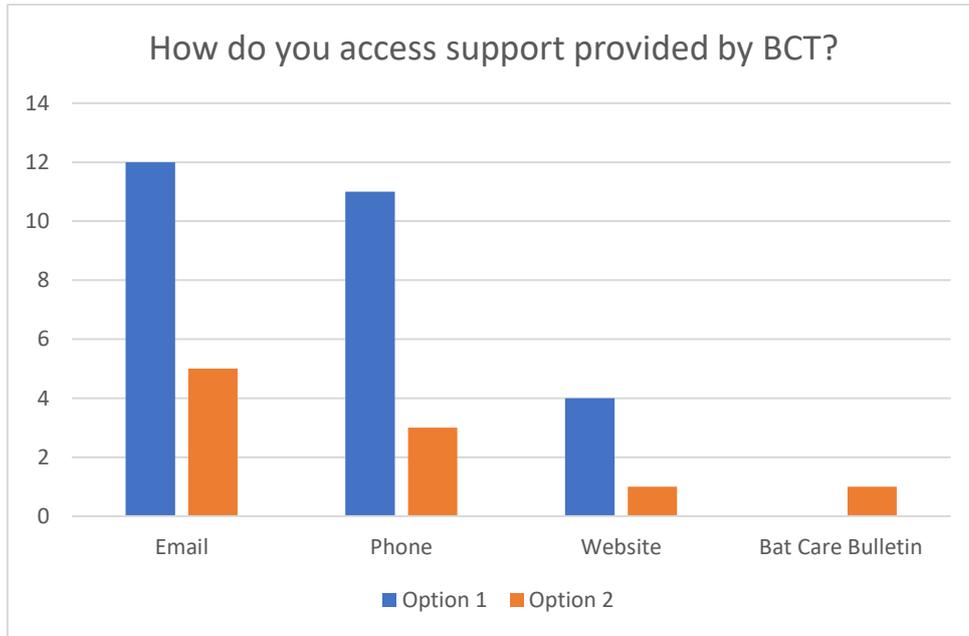


Most respondents sought support in the form of advice on vaccinations, rabies, and COVID-19. Other advice categories that appeared more than once in the responses were roost issues, bat care, illegal landings, and everything. The illustration on the cover of the report is a word cloud summarising the advice sought from BCT.

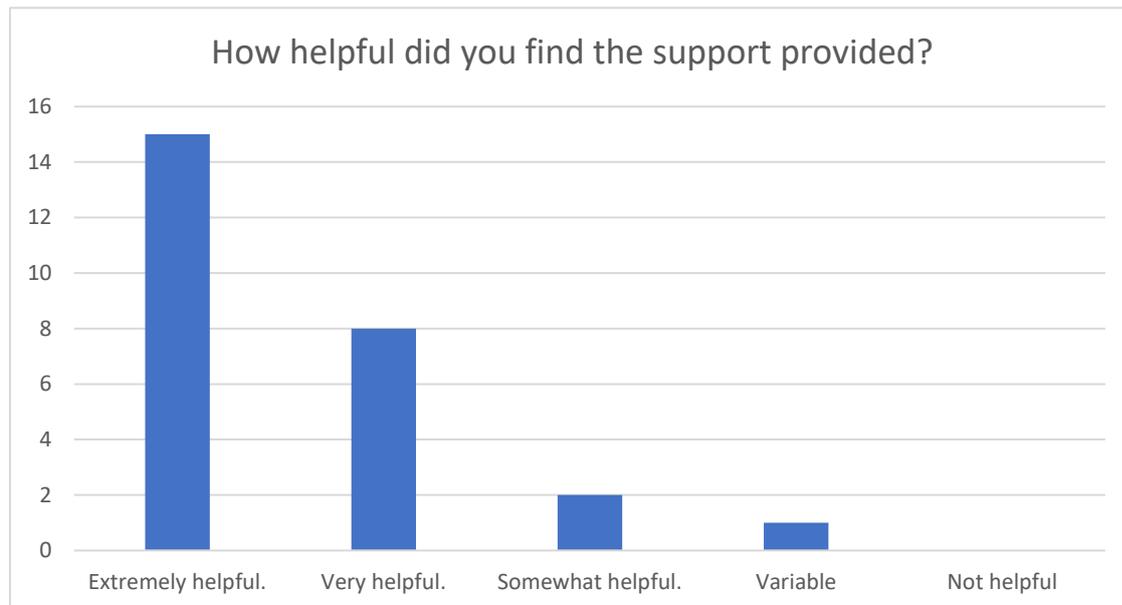
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Section 7. UK Bat Care Network Support

How did you access that support?

This response was split into two options, the first method of access, answered by 27 respondents, and option 2, the second method of access if the individual uses a second method, answered by 10 respondents. As the chart below illustrates, the most common form of access to support was email, followed by a telephone call. This suggests that UK Bat Carer's seek advice that is not available on the website.



How helpful did you find the support provided?



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Section 7. UK Bat Care Network Support

Please expand on your response to the question above, explaining why you found the support helpful.

The respondents found the support from BCT on bat care related matters helpful for a variety of reasons, as set out below:

Comment	Count
BCT answered all my questions, promptly and politely with offers of further information if needed. Great support throughout.	13
Can't remember details.	3
I got the information I needed to enable potential carers to get their vaccinations.	2
I found all the information I required. It was easy to understand.	1
I was beginning to give up. [BCT] made things easier for me.	1
Personal information relating to a particular bat. Co-ordinator also got advice from bat care experts.	1
[Information is] slow in being produced and not updated frequently but the information available is clear.	1
Some general ideas about what to do but it was much better when I had the conversation with people who had successfully freed bats from fly paper, rehabilitated them and then released them successfully.	1
Where a roost visitor is needed or where bats were found during building work.	1

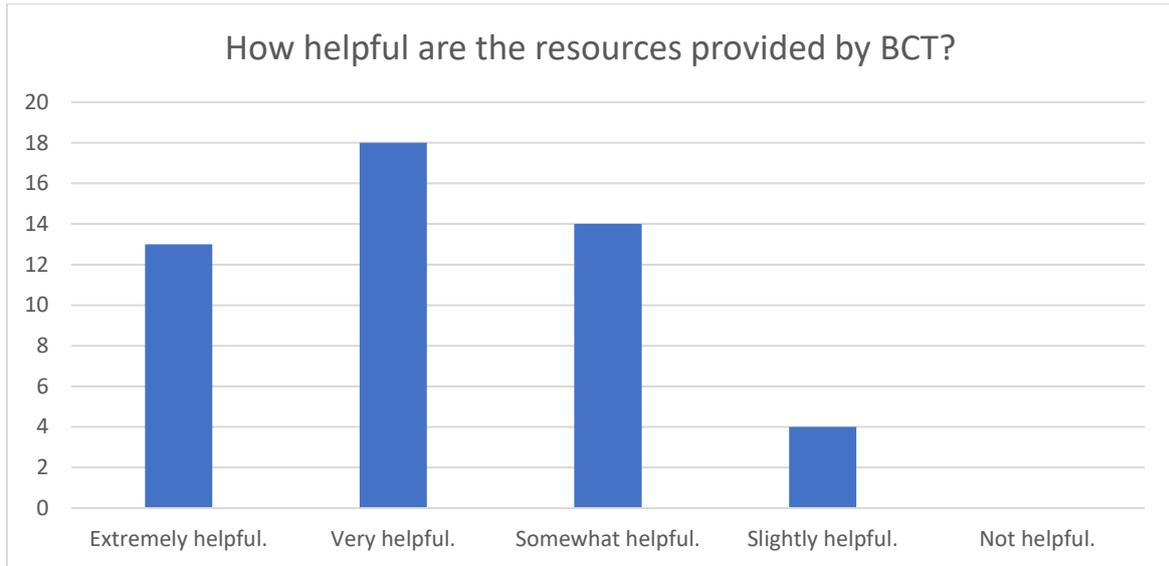
Please expand on your response to the question above, explaining why you didn't find the support helpful.

As no one stated that they didn't find the support helpful, there were no responses to this question.

How helpful are you finding the resources and communications provided by BCT for bat carers and ambulance drivers (including the Bat Care Network resources and recruitment sections of the website, Bat Care Bulletin blog, occasional supplementary mailings, and responses to queries).

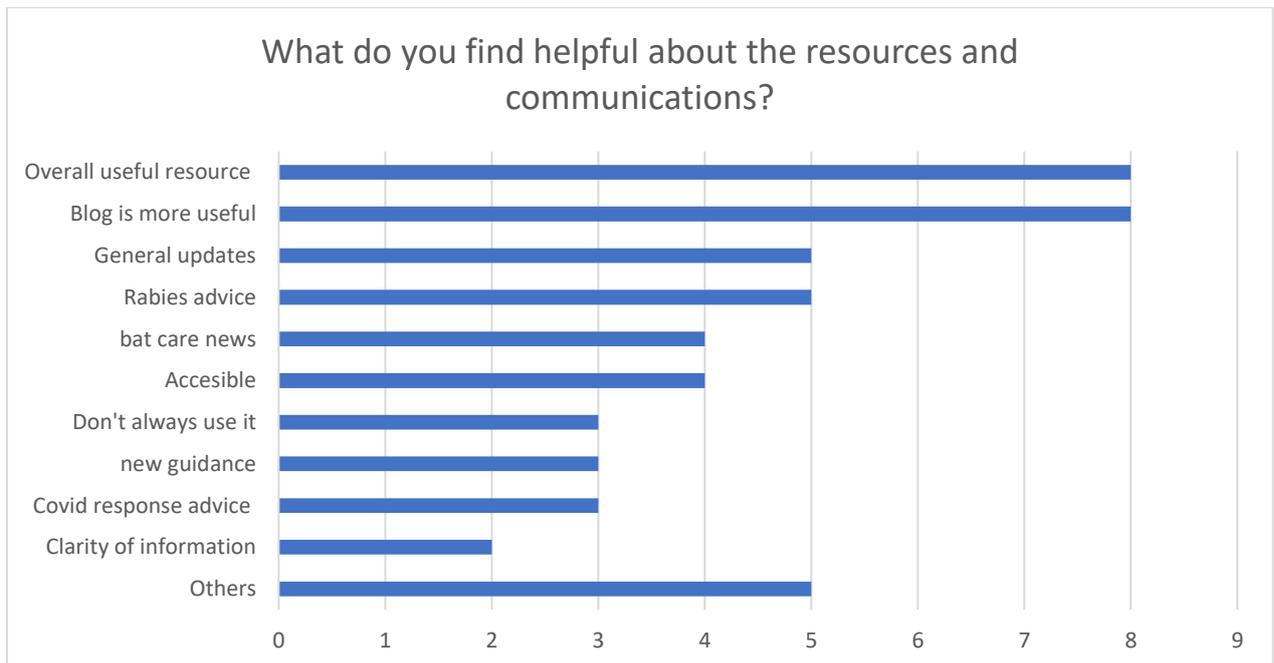
All respondents find the information provided by BCT slightly helpful to very helpful. This suggests the information produced is valuable to UK Bat Care Network members.

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Please expand on your response to the question above, explaining what you find helpful about the resources and communications.

The responses are summarised in the chart below. Those that use the resources and communications produced by BCT find them useful for general updates, rabies advice, bat care news. They find the resources to be accessible, clear, and comprehensive.



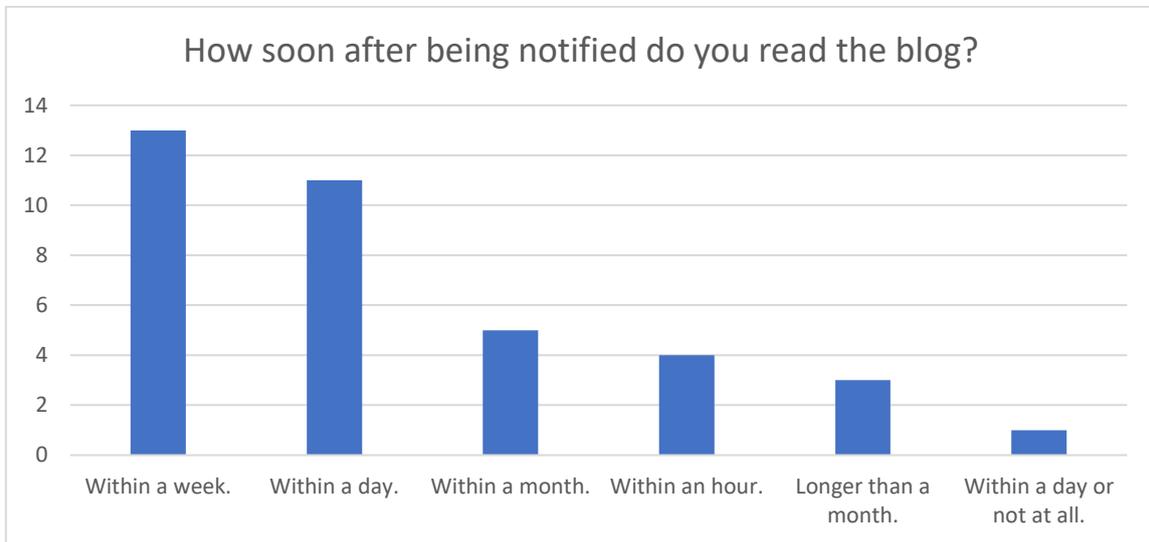
Please expand on your response to the question above, explaining why you don't find the resources and communications helpful.

The questionnaire received no responses to this question.

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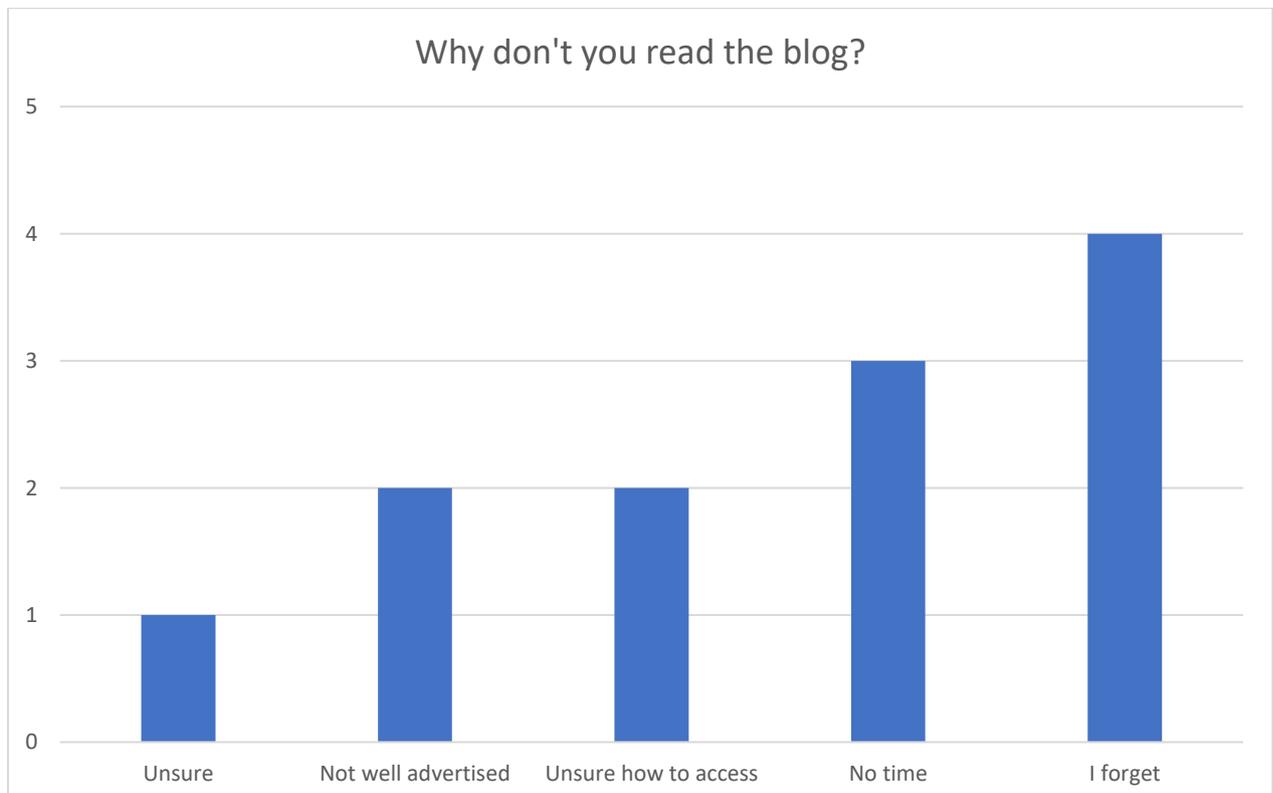
How soon after you are notified of a new blog item do you typically read it?

Of all the 50 UK Bat Care Network respondents, 37 do read the blog, whilst 13 do not. Most of the respondents that do read the Bat Care Bulletin Blog and do so within a month, as the chart below illustrates:



Why don't you read the blog?

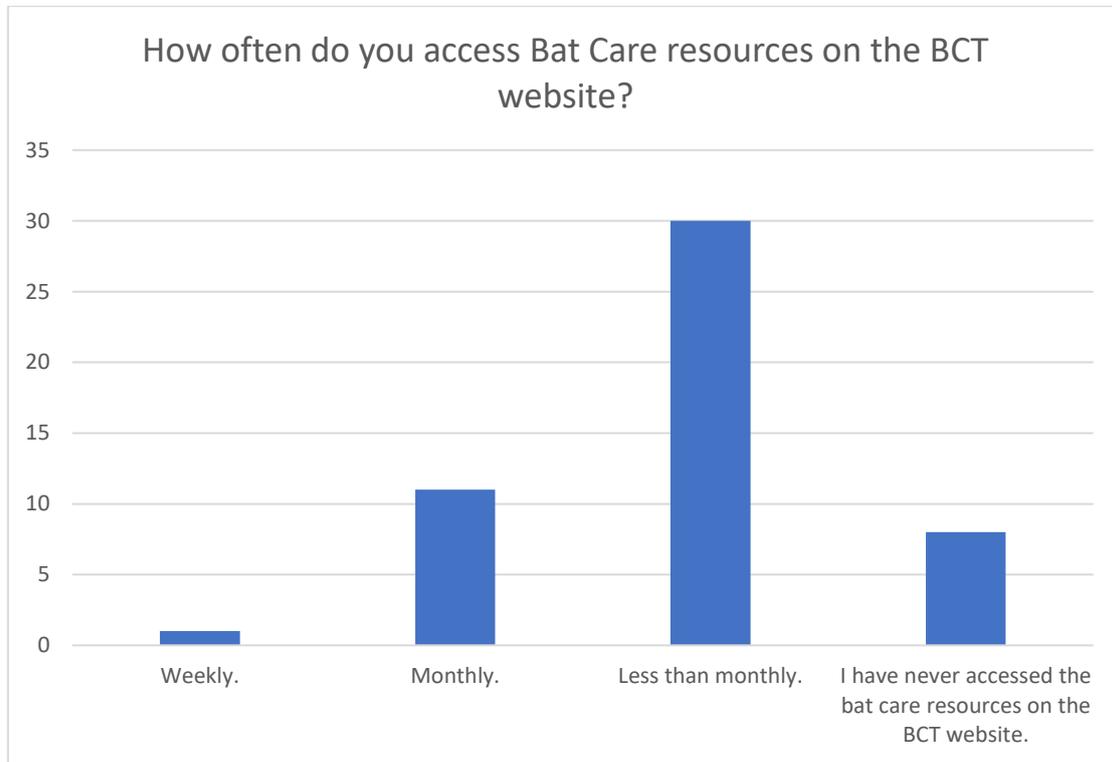
The answers to this question are summarised below, one respondent answered with the following information: 'Blogs are not the way to convey important information as delivery needs to be more reliable for anything vital. BCT stuff is very earnest and not much fun.'



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The most frequent answer that respondents gave to not reading the blog is that they forget, followed by lack of time. There are some respondents that are unsure how to access the blog, and comment that it is not well advertised, these are things that can be addressed.

How often do you typically access the bat care resources on the BCT website?



Are there other bat care resources that you would like to see provided on the website?

Of 49 respondents, 42 stated there are no other bat care resources that they would like to see provided on the website, seven stated that there are other resources.

Please explain what other bat care resources you would like to see provided on the website.

The suggestions to expand the bat care resources on the BCT website are outlined below.

These responses request for more detail for bat finders, more training for bat carers, access to existing resources, and an FAQ.

Comment

A step by step illustrated guide explaining how to properly contain a bat, removing ambiguity, and showing (like if it were a first aid illustrated guide) how to properly contain a bat with water and towel/ cloth in box of adequate size (without voids bat could escape from)

Access to bat care training.

Advice on bat flight cages, how to make, maintain them and how to fly bats successfully within them.

Maggie's handbook

Medicine suitable for bats and ratios etc.

Perhaps an FAQ section or general advice section to help share knowledge, like how the Facebook group currently works but easier to navigate and find answers to questions

Are you a member of the Facebook Bat Rehabilitators Group?

Facebook Bat Rehabilitators is an independent group for bat and rescuers and rehabilitators (and their trainees) in the UK and the rest of the world. It is not for the general public. This forum is for active and trainee bat carers that encourage adherence to BCT guidelines and protocols. Of the respondents, 35 are a member of the group, 15 are not. This is one resource we could suggest to carers that are registered with the BCT UK Bat Carer Network.

Do you receive the Bat Care News from the West Yorkshire Bat Hospital?

West Yorkshire Bat Care operates alongside the Bat Conservation Trust and has a team of dedicated individuals who are able to offer you advice and guidance on what to do next if you have found a bat either indoors or outdoors. "If the bat is injured or grounded, we have ambulance drivers and carers who can care for the bat and return it to health". This is another source of information for the UK Bat Carer Network, of which 20 respondents receive news from, and 30 do not. This may be another resource that BCT suggests Bat Carers access.

Do you have a copy of Maggie and Bryan Brown's Bat Care Manual or access to a copy (e.g. through your bat group)?

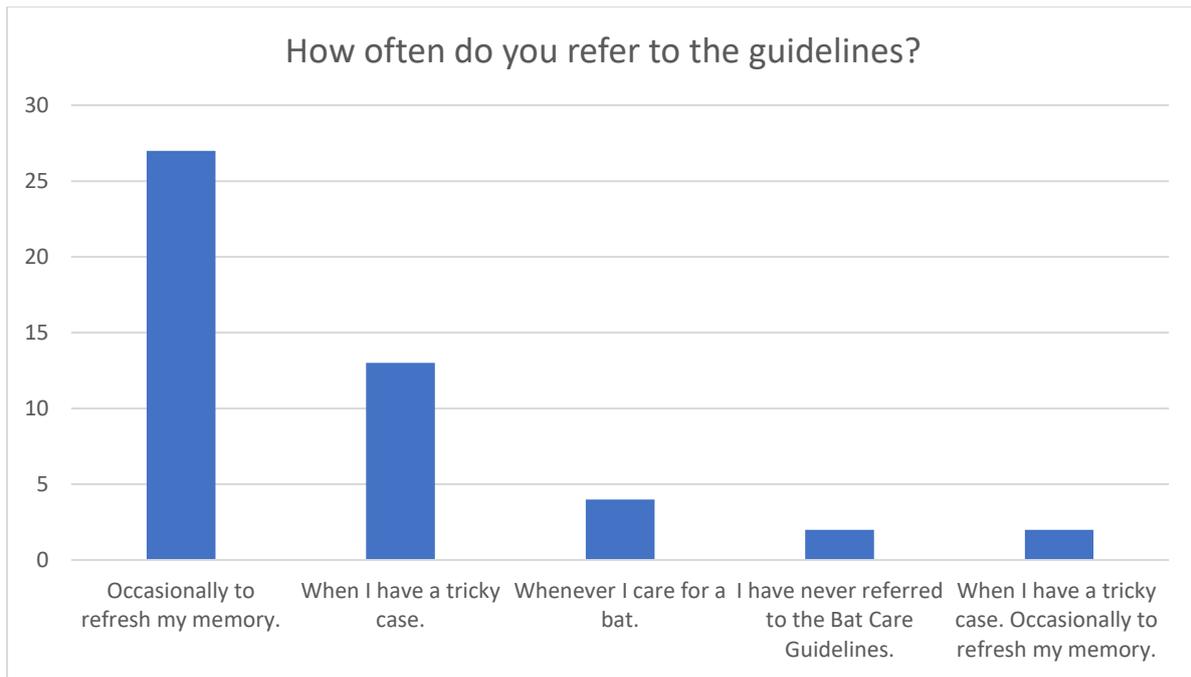
Most UK Bat Carers that answered this questionnaire have access to Maggie and Bryan Brown's Bat Care Manual. This may be a resource that we suggest all new bat carers on the network have access to.

Option	Count
No, I don't have access to a copy.	14
Yes, I have access to someone else's copy.	6
Yes, I have my own copy.	30

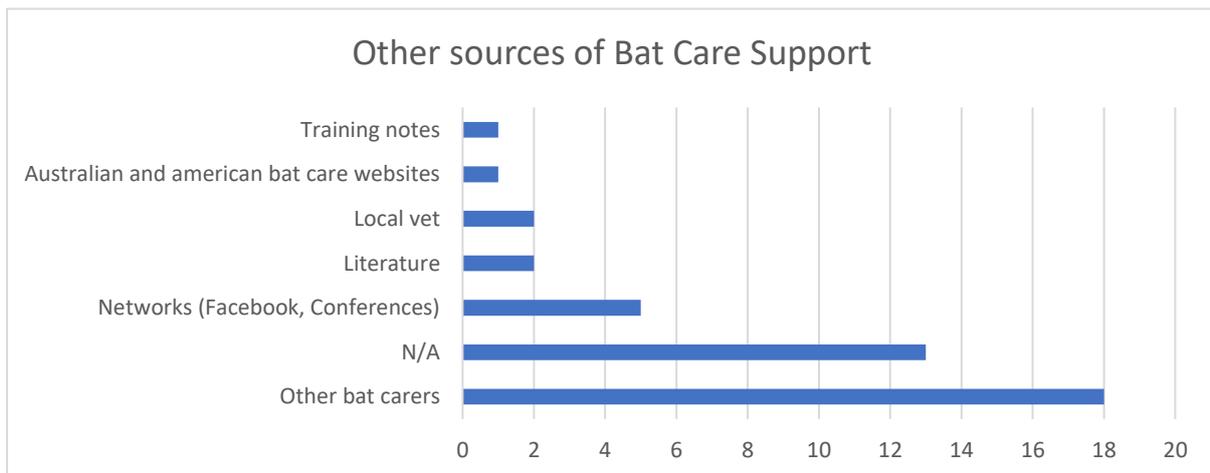
Do you have a copy of BCT's Bat Care Guidelines? How often do you refer to the guidelines?

Most respondents (48) have a copy of the BCT's Bat Care Guidelines, with only two respondents stating they do not. Those that have the Guidelines, refer to them occasionally or when they have a more difficult case, as shown below:

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Any there any other sources of support that you use, if so please list them?



The other sources specifically mentioned were:

- Amanda Lollar's The rehabilitation and captive care of insectivorous bats
- BSAVA Manual of wildlife casualties

Are there any other comments that you wish to make about the BCT UK Bat Care Network?
A variety of comments were given in response to this question. We have separated out those that were suggestions, and these are further explored in Section 9, Proposal for the Future. Both suggestions and comments are provided below:

Suggestions

Email notifications/subscription service of new blogs, or newsletters.

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I don't consider asking volunteers to cover IOH calls is acceptable, I feel that BCT should be looking at the way resources are used in context with other aspects of their work i.e. the commercial sector e.g. 'earned recognition' training for professionals. Resources should be primarily used for day-to-day bat conservation & care.

More virtual events and sessions please.

I'd like to be able to communicate with other carers. Please address the GDPR issues and enable communications between ourselves.

[It would] be good to have a system where if [a bat finder] needs info about bats [to have] an automated system that ensures they have a bat that needs picking up and assessment and that it is properly contained before details of drivers and carers are given out.

Guidance on pups would be useful.

Comments

I like how it facilitates carer autonomy without making regional helpline group membership mandatory.

I understand the difficulties experienced at all levels over the last 2 years and appreciate the effort that has gone into keeping it running.

It [UK Bat Care Network] is fabulous. Without the BCT Network we wouldn't be able to do what we do. We need it as it is, not diluted, not swamped in technology.

It used to work very well, during COVID-19 there have clearly been some problems, but everyone has experienced problems over this time so not specific to BCT. This last year the helpline not up to normal standards and when I dared to comment on something particularly bothering me, I received a rather dismissive response.

I get calls from people about birds because the RSPB doesn't give advice about bird casualties. I think BCT should be proud of their bat carers and the service they provide.

I think moving away from dealing with bat care calls on the helpline a huge mistake. Most people's love and connection with wildlife comes from a direct experience. Contact with a grounded bat can often result in a lifelong love of bats with people joining their local groups etc. BCT should be building on this contact to expand membership and interest.

The current system, if it were well resourced and enough volunteers were available, would continue to be my preferred option.

I think it's great, we are not alone, and someone will have an answer to a situation that is new to you. Also, people are generally friendly and willing to help/support. I really value the network.

It is a brilliant service contributing to the conservation of bats by engaging with members of the public in a positive way.

It has been a wonderful resource which has become a victim of its own success. It needs funded, dedicated and knowledgeable staff but I don't have the resources to fund it myself, sorry.

I do not have a face book account but some of our carers do access this [Facebook Bat Rehabilitators Group]. We provide this [the BCT bat care manual] for all our careers in our care group plus our own Bat Group manual.

One of the concerns we have is the advice that finders are told to go to a vet if we are not available. This can be problematical. We have had finders who have been turned away from vets and others who, when they have called on the phone, have been told no "we are not allowed to take bats" or even "they have rabies" we know that vets should at least put a bat

to sleep if mortally injured. But if they don't even look that cannot happen. As carers we have had to pick up bats that are "fine" from a vet's surgery and looking at it before leaving to hand it back for euthanasia with moribund injuries.

Will all vets be told that, whatever system is in place, finders will default to them after a couple of hours (many will not wait the full 5 for perceived non urgent bats?) Will they need to agree to this?

Bat Groups

Although this section of the questionnaire was specifically for members of the UK Bat Care Network, we did give bat groups the opportunity to add any comments from their perspective on support available for bat carers. Six bat groups took that opportunity, with comments as follow:

As a number of our bat carers are also registered on the Bat Care Network in order to operate slightly outside our network boundaries, we have a good knowledge of the resources and support provided by BCT and know that they are excellent! We sincerely hope that whatever happens after this consultation, these resources are kept available and up to date and support continues.

Comment from one Trustee that they are aware of a number of people trying to register with the care network multiple times who have not received responses.

It would be helpful to know what advice exactly is given to members of the public, before they come through to a carer just so we know what has been covered - and what their expectations are. Online training & support for new carers would be good. Tips on use of ambulance drivers – how much do they need to know? The FB carers page is good for supporting carers.

The current triage and advice given to callers is invaluable.

This has similar issues to how bat calls come in now - in that callers can end up raising an enquiry on multiple phones with multiple people, who then duplicate efforts and waste scarce time - better not to just give out lists of numbers, if possible.

We like the emails from BCT for the bat care network as well as the Blog that has been kept updated so well, although some of that information isn't relevant to bat care. We have been given 4 options but they should not be seen as exclusive. We don't want to rank them saying to go with one or the other, however have done so to help the decision. You may be able to use option 4 mixed with option 1 and 2 - the tech could reduce the number of calls, meaning more shifts covered which is essential if 1 is to be used at all. Option 2 is already in place for a number of groups. Either way BCT need to ensure that if they are running a bat care call service that it is 100% covered for the hours they advertise – we manage this a volunteer group, BCT must do the same.

8. Closing Questions

8.1 Introduction

This section of the questionnaire included questions aimed at understanding what respondents' preferred choices were in relation to the four options being proposed and whether there were any options that they felt particularly strongly about (either positively or negatively). It was also an opportunity for respondents to make any additional comments that hadn't been covered by the earlier sections.

As a reminder, these are the four options presented in the consultation:

- Option 1. Volunteer call handlers covering both out of hours and in office hours, supported by BCT staff.
- Option 2. Regional/bat groups helplines take bat care calls instead of the BCT Helpline.
- Option 3. Bat finders' details get passed direct to carers via an online system or app
- Option 4. Carer numbers made available direct to bat finders via an online system or app.

This was the shortest section of the questionnaire and as such we have combined the UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups responses in the text but shown them separately in the graphs of the results (where relevant).

8.2 Summary of results

Overall, the clear preference is for Option 1 where volunteer call handlers cover both out of hours and in office hours bat care related enquiries, supported by BCT staff (as they have since spring 2021), with two thirds of respondents (50) selecting this option as their first choice. This was also supported by how people felt about the options with the majority of respondents being either happy or somewhat happy with this option (65), even if it hadn't been their first choice. Seven respondents (all members of the UK Bat Care network) stated that they would be unhappy or somewhat unhappy if this option was chosen; with two (both UK Bat Care networks members) stating that option 1 would prevent them working with BCT on bat care.

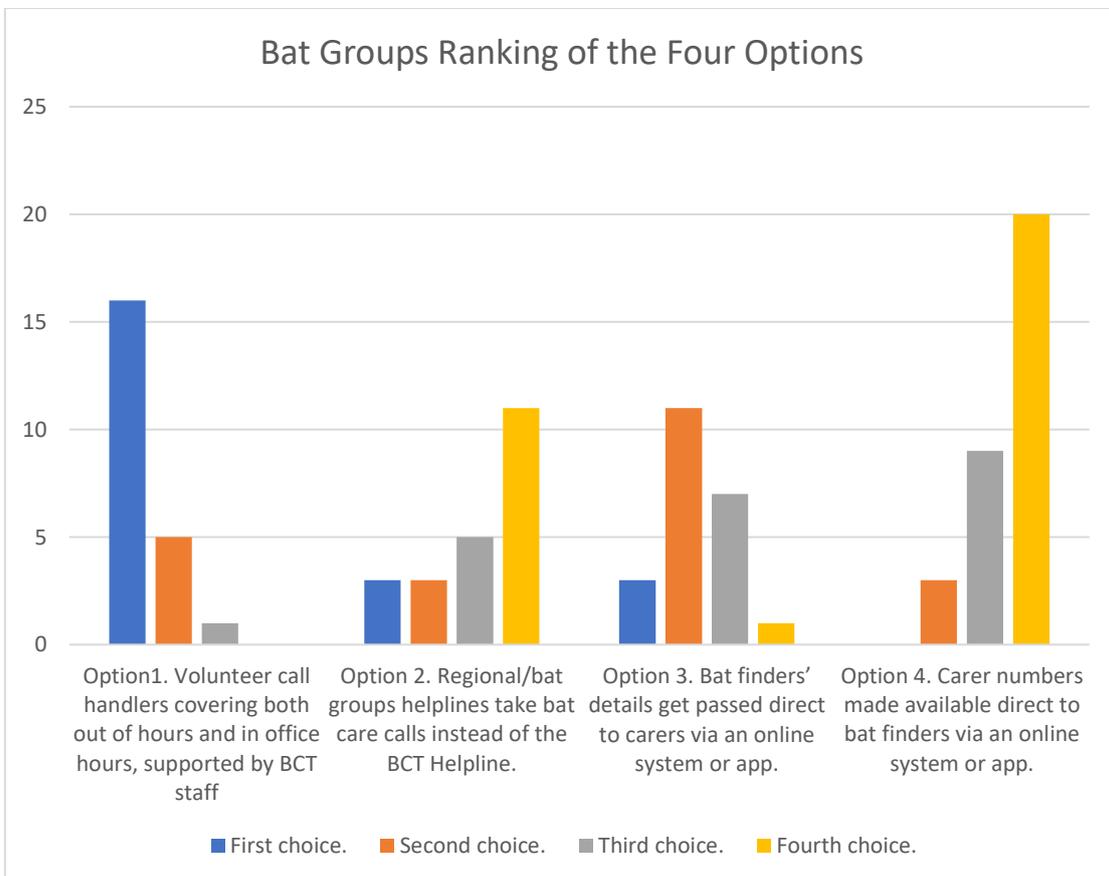
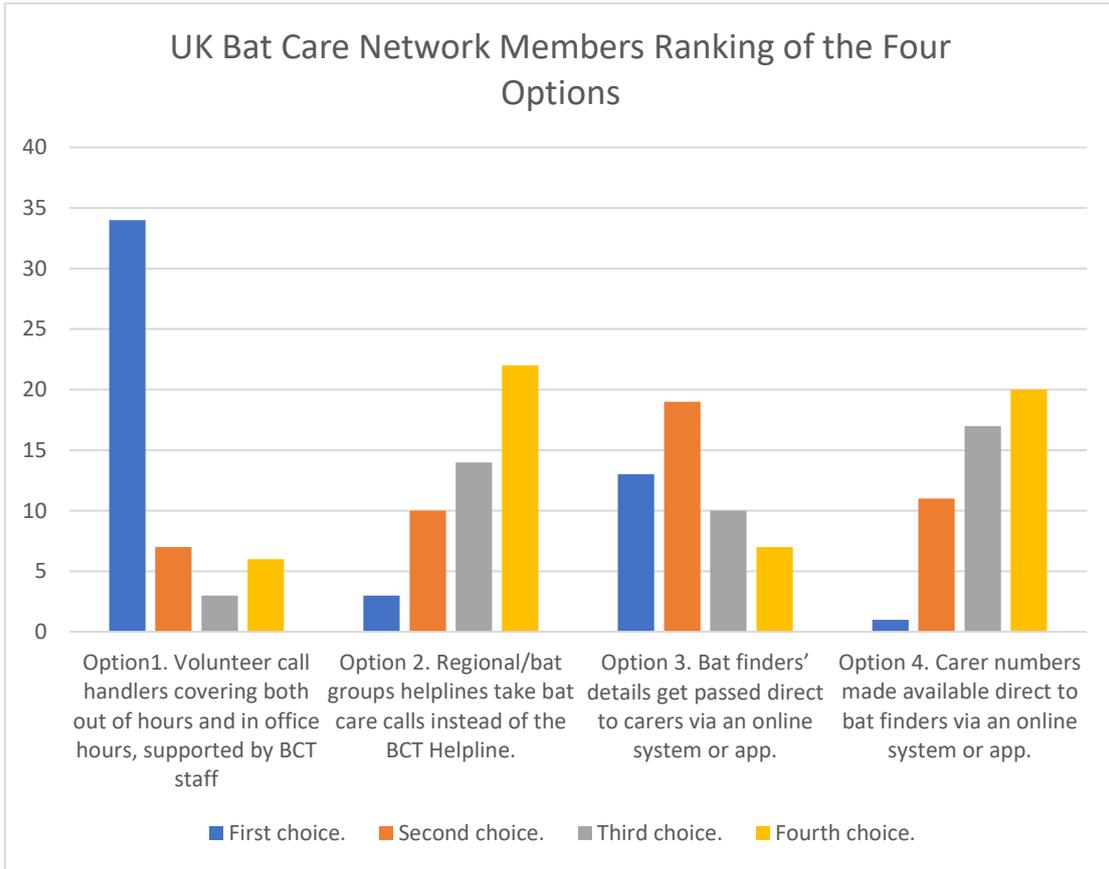
8.3 Analysis of results

Ranking of the four options

We asked all respondents to rank the four options for the handling of bat care calls in order of preference (first choice, second choice, third choice, and fourth choice). 72/74 respondents answered these questions (50 UK Bat Care Network members and 22 bat groups), but one respondent only stated their first choice option.

The two charts below show the preferences of UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups. In both cases Option 1. comes out as the top preference. It is also the case, that for both types of respondents, Options 2. (regional/bat group helplines) and 4. (carer numbers made available via an online system or app) are the less preferred choices.

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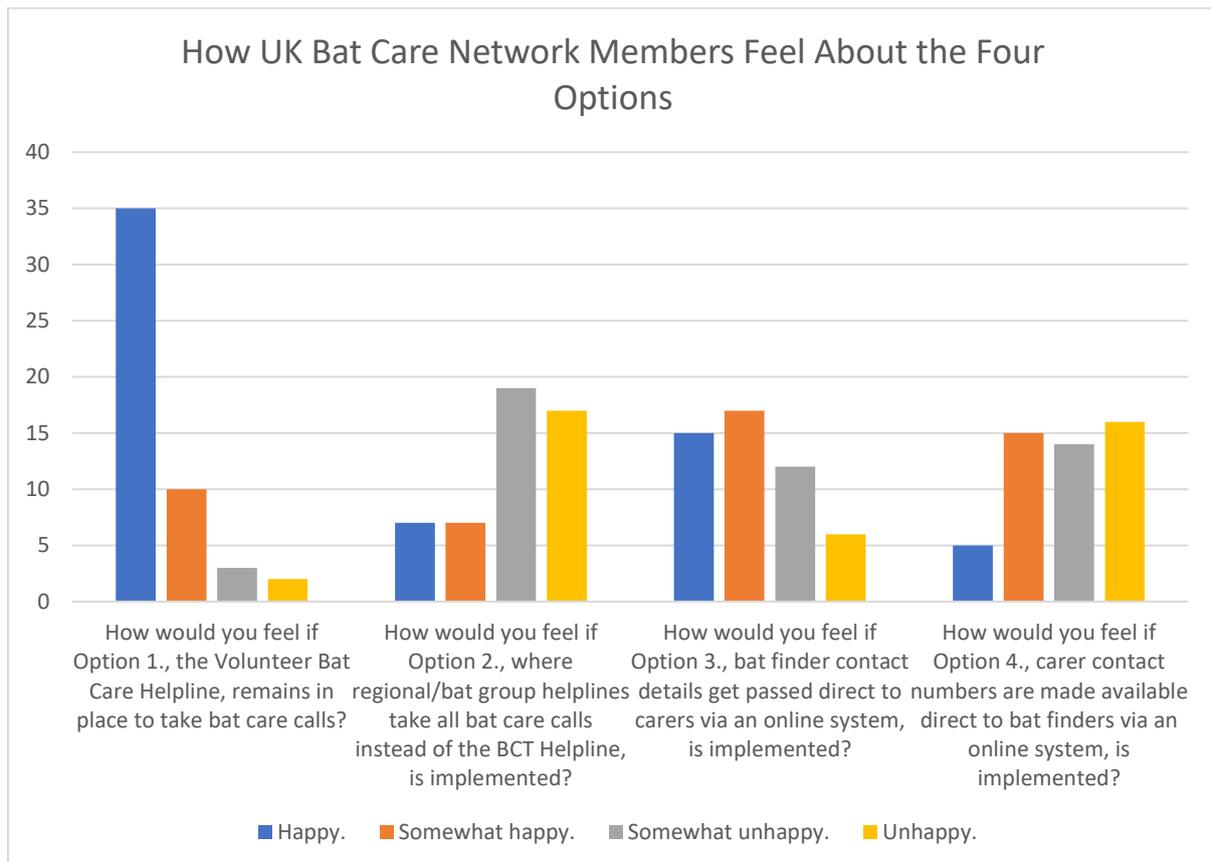


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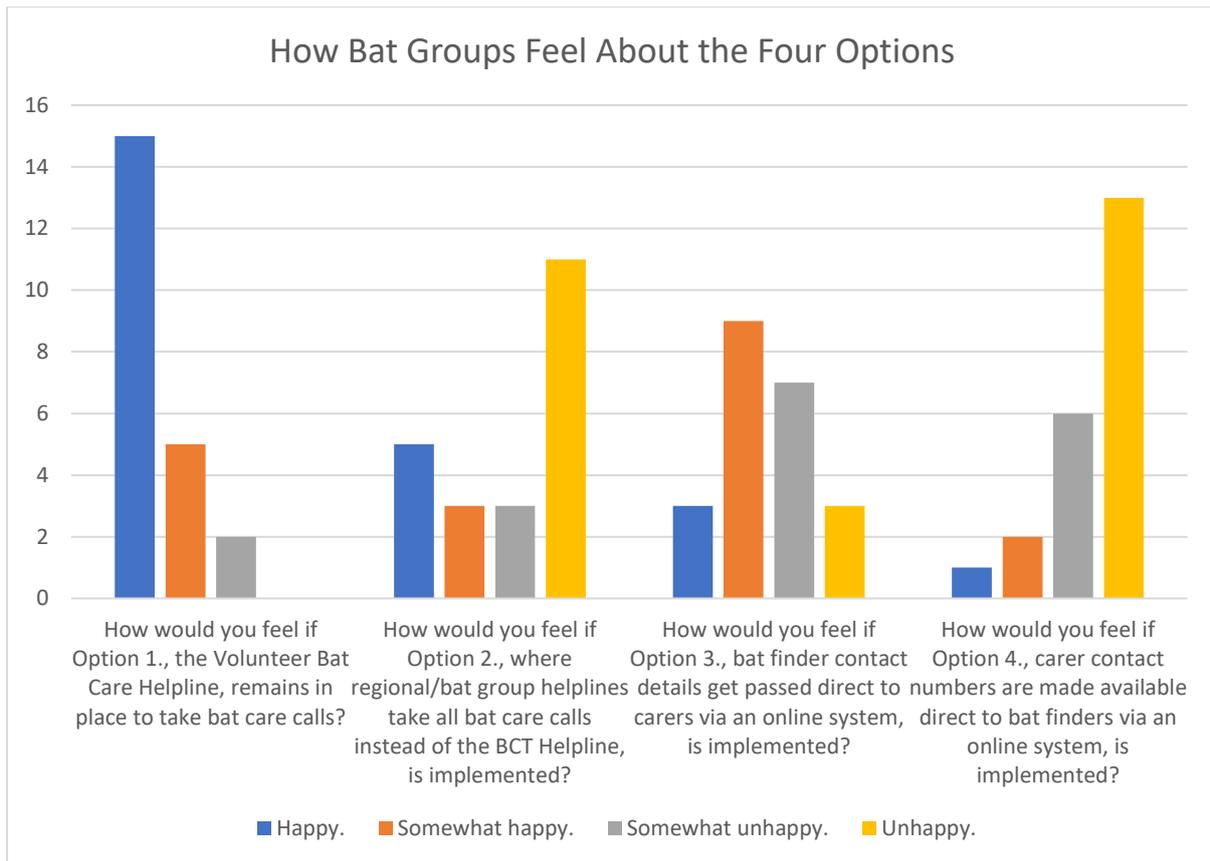
How strongly respondents felt about the four options

We asked respondents how they would feel if an option were the final outcome of the consultation (happy, somewhat happy, somewhat unhappy, and not happy). 72/74 replied to this question (50 UK Bat Care Network members and 22 bat groups).

As would be expected, these results mirrored those of the rankings of the four options, with most respondents to this question (50) stating that they would be happy with Option 1., and a further 15 stating they would be somewhat happy. Whereas just five respondents would be somewhat unhappy and only two would be unhappy if Option 1. were to be the final outcome.



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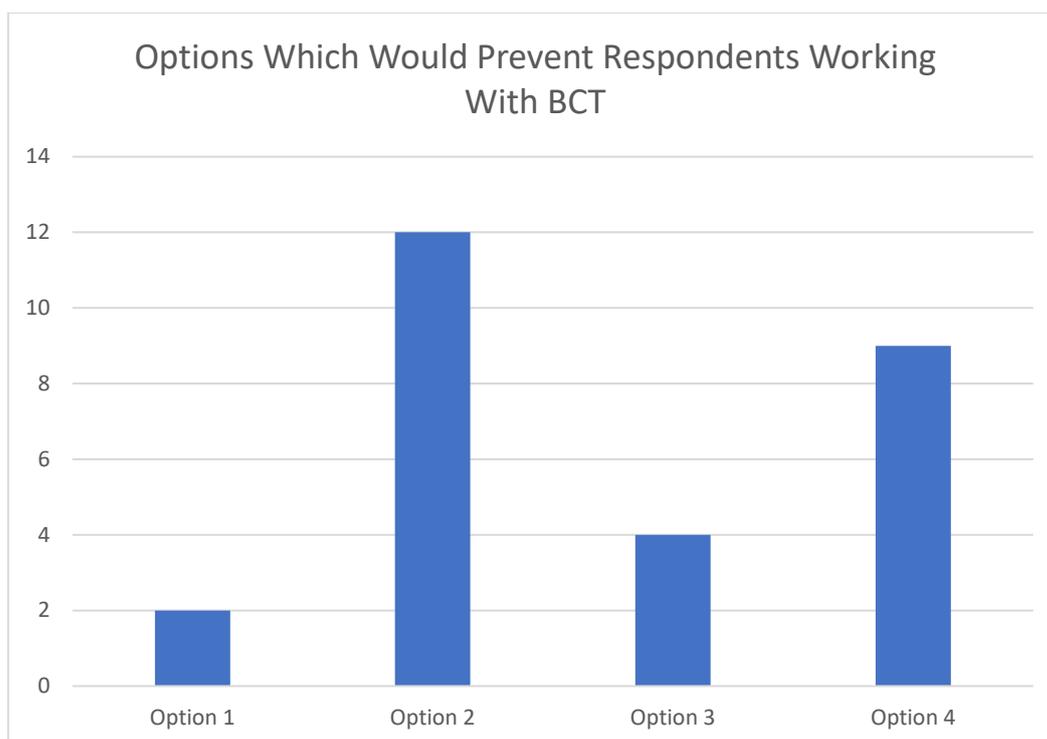


[Options that would prevent respondents working with BCT](#)

We asked the members of the UK Bat Care Network (bat groups did not get this question) whether any of the options described would prevent them working with BCT on bat care. 43/50 replied to this question. Twenty-five respondents stated that none of the options would prevent them working with BCT, but of those four people highlighted this was for the sake of the bats or because of their commitment to bat rehabilitation, and they would make things work even if the outcome was not their preferred option.

One person was unsure whether any of the options would stop them working with BCT on the UK Bat Care Calls Network. For the remaining 17 people, there was one or more option that would prevent them working with BCT (as shown in the chart below). Two people would not work with BCT if Option 1. was the outcome. Ten people stated that just one option would be problematic but for seven people there were at least two options that would prevent them working with BCT. The option most likely to stop a UK Bat Care Network member continuing to work with BCT is Option 2. where regional/bat group helplines take all bat care calls instead of BCT. This matches the number of respondents unhappy around this option. Interestingly, Option 4. would stop nine respondents working with BCT, three less than the number of UK Bat Care Network members who stated they would be unhappy if this were implemented.

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Other comments

We included a catch-all question at the end where respondents could make any other comments they wanted to make, that hadn't been covered elsewhere in the questionnaire. 16/50 provided additional comments (13 UK Bat Care Network members and three bat groups).

These responses were very varied, with feedback on the technical side of submitting a consultation response (two responses), highlighting issues of capacity as bat groups (three responses) and as carers (three responses), that a combination of options could work well (two responses), positive feedback on the existing Helpline (two responses), reiterating issues over one of more options (three responses), and an offer around fundraising (one response). All of the comments have been considered and reflected in the proposals for the way forward, as appropriate.

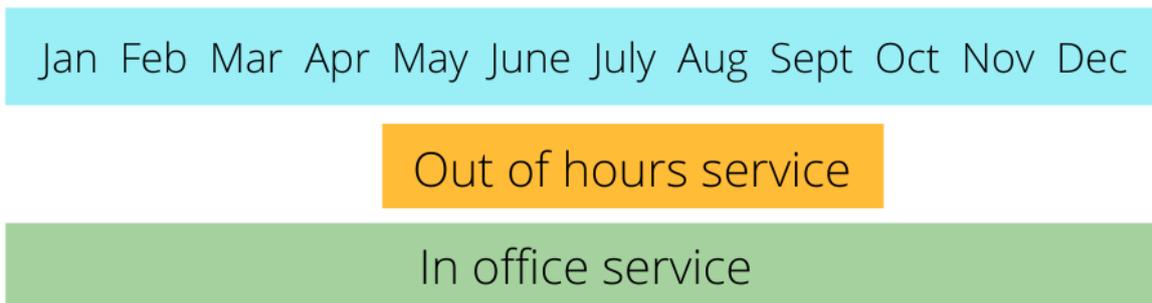
9. Proposal for the Future of Bat Care Call Handling

9.1 Introduction

This consultation was very valuable in gathering the opinions of UK Bat Network members and bat groups in response to the proposed options for the future of Bat Care Call handling. Out of the options presented, Option 1. Volunteer call handlers covering both out of hours and in office hours, supported by BCT staff, came out as the preferred first choice for both UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups. The National Bat Helpline will therefore continue with the running of the Volunteer Bat Care Helpline (VBCH) service for the foreseeable future. In addition, we will explore how we can make better use of technology to support members of the UK Bat Care Network, taking on board the range of comments and suggestions that we have received through the consultation.

9.2 Volunteer Bat Care Helpline Service

As illustrated below, a weekday, daytime VBCH service will run all year round from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Volunteers will answer bat care enquiries from members of the public and be supported by Helpline staff. An additional emergency service will run over the busier summer months (May to September) in evenings (6pm to 10pm) and weekends (10am to 10pm). During this out of hours service, volunteers will answer bat care and crime enquiries from members of the public. The VBCH volunteers will be supported by Helpline staff.



Timetable for the Volunteer Bat Care Helpline service

The VBCH pilot in 2021 was not without issues and was an important learning experience for BCT in how to run a volunteer helpline. We are thankful for the feedback and suggestions received during the consultation on the VBCH service and will continue to work to improve the service. Our priority is to achieve a greater level of shift coverage and volunteer retention going forward.

As a volunteer service we hope that volunteers will commit to their Bat Watch shift once signed up, however we understand that unexpected and last-minute changes happen. This year we have asked volunteers to let us know their availability preferences (see table below for the shift patterns) so that we can send better targeted emails to individuals with availability when a Bat Watch needs to be covered.

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	Weekdays	Weekends
<i>Morning</i>	9:30 – 13:00*	10:00 – 14:00
<i>Afternoon</i>	13:00 – 16:30*	14:00 – 18:00
<i>Evening</i>	18:00 – 22:00	18:00 – 22:00

* - please note these are during office hours.

Table showing how volunteer availability preferences are broken down on the VBCH

There were some bat carers that received calls outside of their area, this can be addressed through communicating specific limitations to the Bat Care Coordinator. At the moment we ask bat carers to provide radius from their home of which they are comfortable to cover bat care calls. Some carers have provided counties, or even postcodes that they are happy to assist in. By giving bat carers more flexibility on their geographic limitations, this should also address the issues raised with volunteer’s geography knowledge. Throughout their training, and during their Bat Watch shifts, staff emphasise the importance of respecting the radiuses or geographical limitations recorded for each carer.

There are a few concerns raised around call answering times. We recently moved to a new telephony system, which should help to alleviate these concerns. Our messaging to the public via the phone menu, along with information on the BCT website and social media is continually improving, which will also help. We allocate the number of volunteers on one Bat Watch shift depending on the expected number of calls. This season, we have 20 volunteers retained from the winter season, and recruited a further 113 volunteers for the VBCH project. We anticipate that this increase in the number of volunteers will be enough to support the number of calls over the summer months. We recognise the value in keeping those volunteers engaged through ongoing support, training, and embedding a sense of community and purpose into the role as well. Now that this project will be ongoing, we will continue to request feedback from staff and volunteers involved, as well as bat groups to continue to improve the service we provide to our volunteers, our bat carers and our bat finders.

The suggestions brought forward from the consultation were enlightening. Each VBCH handled call provides containment advice, notifying the finder of rabies risk, taking details of the caller and the case, and then providing carer details. As was the situation when we had paid staff taking these calls, due to the call volume received by the VBCH, the volunteers cannot phone carers to provide the finders information; finders calling carers is a more efficient use of time. We do understand that this prevents some people from registering on the UK Bat Care Network. One of the advantages of local/regional helplines can be to address this (see below).

The VBCH started as a pilot during office hours in 2021. Based on the outcome of this consultation we are considering alternate recruitment strategies to increase the number of volunteers per season, as well as the engagement of volunteers throughout the season. We have made changes already for 2022, with additional training and clarity over shift patterns.

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Our VBCH volunteers receive full training on the volunteer role, but we are also creating a programme of lunchtime talks for staff and VBCH volunteers that are optional to attend. Based on suggestions from this consultation we will be looking to add a session on basic bat care.

When the VBCH is closed due to no volunteers on the Bat Watch shift, we do put messages out on social media to inform about the closure. We will consider using other ways to let members of the UK Bat Care Network know when that occurs. When a VBCH shift is closed either in or out of office hours, there is an audio playback in which the finders are given containment advice and directed to our website as well as local wildlife hospitals or vets.

9.3 Regional/Bat Group Helplines

As part of the UK Bat Care Network, we currently have 15 Regional/Bat Group Helplines throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. These are organisations, usually associated with bat groups, which have agreed to provide a single point of contact for all bat care calls in their area. These groups will continue to provide their services in a voluntary capacity and receive enquiries where their details have been shared via the National Bat Helpline.

Whilst the recommendation from this consultation is to continue with the Volunteer Bat Care Helpline, we recognise the value in a multi-pronged approach to bat care, allowing bat workers flexibility to fit this work into their busy lives. Therefore, we will continue to support bat carers that wish to organise themselves through a regional/bat group helpline on the UK Bat Care Network.

9.4 Online system or app

This consultation has highlighted the potential to improve management and coordination for Network members who prefer to use technology such as website and mobile apps. Helpful functionalities include allowing Network members to set their own availability and preferences, allowing users to see who else has received/accepted a request, could all benefit the coordination of bat care. An online system also has the possibility to enhance the bat care call handling process for bat finders by increasing accessibility to those that prefer to communicate via such technology. Any use of online forms and mobile apps would be alongside the arrangements already in place. We understand that not everyone is comfortable with such technology. There are also other potential issues, including the risks of online systems around data protection issues and safeguarding, which would need to be considered carefully and mitigated for.

The consultation has also shown that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work for the UK Bat Care Network and bat groups, so the optimal online service would need to provide a range of options for users. The National Bat Helpline does not yet have any available budget for such enhancements to the service, however we appreciate the potential benefits that having a web or app option, running alongside the VBCH, could provide and we will look into this possibility in the future. Equally, a case can certainly be made for adopting an up-to-date system for bat care call records, but again, the National Bat Helpline does not currently have any budget allocation for this. As we develop a strategy for the future, the consultation results will be referred to when outlining expectations and deliverables for a new system. In

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summary, this is very much an area that we would like to investigate further but we will not be implementing a new system in the foreseeable future, rather it is a longer-term goal.

9.5 Thank you

We couldn't offer any sort of service to bat finders without the vital contribution of everyone involved in bat rehabilitation in the UK and especially our Network members. We are very grateful for all of the UK Bat Care Network members and bat groups who took part in the consultation. Your input will help us shape the future of bat care call handling and the support for the UK Bat Care Network.