

Domestic Animal Management Plan

2021-2025



City of
Whittlesea



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1. Introduction & Context

1.1 Purpose of Domestic Animal Management Plan

The Domestic Animals Act 1994 (the Act) requires councils in Victoria to develop a domestic animal management plan (DAMP), every four years. The DAMP must outline Council services, programs and policies established to address the administration of the Act, and Council's management of cat and dog issues in their community. Councils must review their DAMPs annually and publish an evaluation of the implementation of the past year's actions in their Annual Report.

DAMPs should cover the following issues:

- Ensure that people comply with the Act, the regulations and any related legislation
- Minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals
- Address any overpopulation and high euthanasia rates for cats and dogs
- Encourage the registration and identification of cats and dogs
- Minimise the potential for cats and dogs to create a nuisance
- Effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with this Act and the regulation
- Provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and local laws that relate to the Council's municipal district with a view to determining whether further orders or local laws dealing with the management of cats and dogs in the municipal district are desirable
- Provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of cats and dogs in the Council's municipal district that it thinks necessary
- Provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

The benefits of pet ownership for people's health and wellbeing are well established. Whilst Domestic Animal Management Plans are concerned primarily with the management of cats and dogs within the community, it is important to note that pet ownership has a range of positive outcomes for the ongoing physical and mental health of community members, including:

- Preventing loneliness
- Motivating people to exercise regularly
- Creating opportunities to meet people and make new friends
- Teaching responsibility, as pets require ongoing care.

Pets are often viewed as extended members of the family and can provide great companionship, affection and joy.



1.2 Process Applied in Developing the Plan

The City of Whittlesea's DAMP was developed through a sector-leading approach in partnership with neighbouring councils, the City of Darebin and Moreland City Council.

An inter-organisational working group was developed to encourage partnerships and lead best-practice. The development of the DAMP was driven by the working group through four specific stages.

Stage 1: Background research and analysis

A detailed background report was developed which outlined an overview of the local government area; relevant state and local policies; an analysis of Council's current DAMP; emerging issues in domestic animal management; internal staff consultation and current animal management statistics.

Stage 2: Community consultation

A detailed community engagement program was delivered to encourage the community to have their say on domestic animal management issues.

Approximately 1,624 people who live, work or visit the Cities of Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea provided feedback.

Feedback was gathered through three methods:

- A detailed online survey which was available through a dedicated project webpage;
- Community pop-ups held at key venues and locations across the local government areas; and
- Telephone interviews conducted with key stakeholders.



Online Survey

1,255 surveys completed

1,763 unique comments received



12 Community Pop-ups

369 participants

1,286 unique comments received



Key Stakeholder Interviews

10 key stakeholder interviewed

The feedback received from community members has been used to inform the priorities and actions outlined in the DAMP. A full engagement report which outlines the community feedback is also available, the key themes found across the engagement program are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Key themes across the engagement program

DAMP Theme	Key sub-theme
Responsible pet ownership	Improving owner behaviours and control of animals Increasing community education and training
Dog attacks	Improving safety at dog parks
Overpopulation of cats and dogs	Increasing cat desexing Introducing cat trap, neuter, release program Reducing stray cats
Registration and identification of cats and dogs	Reducing registration fees Providing free/reduced microchipping Reviewing the ease of registering a pet Allowing vets and Council to check pet's microchip before taking animal to the pound
Protection from nuisance	Addressing dog faeces in public places Addressing cat faeces in private properties Addressing excessive noise from dog barking and cats fighting Increasing the provision of dog faeces bags and bins Addressing stray cats to protect wildlife Enforcing cat curfews
Dangerous and restricted dogs	Improving signage Addressing aggressive dogs in off-leash parks Addressing specific needs of greyhound dogs
Review of Council services	Improving/increasing relevant signage Increasing patrols and visibility Increasing community education Increasing dog off/on-leash areas Improving safety of Council parks Improving fencing for animals Increasing fines for people doing the wrong thing Reviewing customer service practices of Epping Animal Welfare Facility in regard to euthanasia
Training for authorised officers	Providing training to encourage positive interactions with the community

Stage 3: Joint council planning

Relevant Council officers from the Cities of Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea participated in a joint Council planning session to analyse the community feedback, determine appropriate actions for the respective DAMPs and identify opportunities for partnership and cost-savings.

Stage 4: Public exhibition

To finalise the Plan and ensure that community feedback was captured in the first round of community engagement, a formal public exhibition period was held from 8 to 30 September 2021. Council received 110 submissions on the draft Plan which related to the following topics:



Proposed cat curfew



Pet registration



Dogs off leash



Dog waste



Dog parks and walking paths



Proposed mandatory cat desexing



Dog attacks



Barking dogs



Excess animal permits



Education initiatives

The public exhibition period included:

- An online presentation and question and answer session held on 23 September 2021. 35 people registered for the event and officers responded to 32 questions received from the public
- An e-newsletter sent to 12,000 recipients to advise that the draft Plan was available for feedback and inviting residents to attend the online presentation
- Information and polls on the Council's engagement platform
- A media release, web and social media content (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) to promote the public exhibition period.

Changes to the final Plan were made as a result of community feedback obtained through this public exhibition.

1.3 Demographic Profile of Council

The City of Whittlesea is located in Melbourne's north, about 20km from the Central Business District (CBD). It is one of the largest municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne, covering an area of approximately 489 square kilometres.

About 70 per cent of the City is rural area, with the other 30 per cent being urban area, comprising houses, shops and factories.

The City of Whittlesea is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia. The estimated population for 2020 is 236,539. This is expected to grow to 388,417 by 2041.

The community is slightly younger than average, with the largest age group being 30-34 years (9.1%), compared to (8.25%) throughout Greater Melbourne.

The City of Whittlesea is one of the most multicultural municipalities in Victoria. In 2016, almost half of all local residents (over 86,000 residents) spoke a language other than English at home. The most common languages, other than English are Macedonian, Arabic, Italian, Greek and Punjabi. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is around 1,638 people or 0.7%, higher than Greater Melbourne average (0.5%).



Urban areas include:

- Bundoora (part)
- Doreen (part)
- Epping
- Epping North
- Lalor
- Mernda
- Mill Park
- South Morang
- Thomastown
- Whittlesea Township

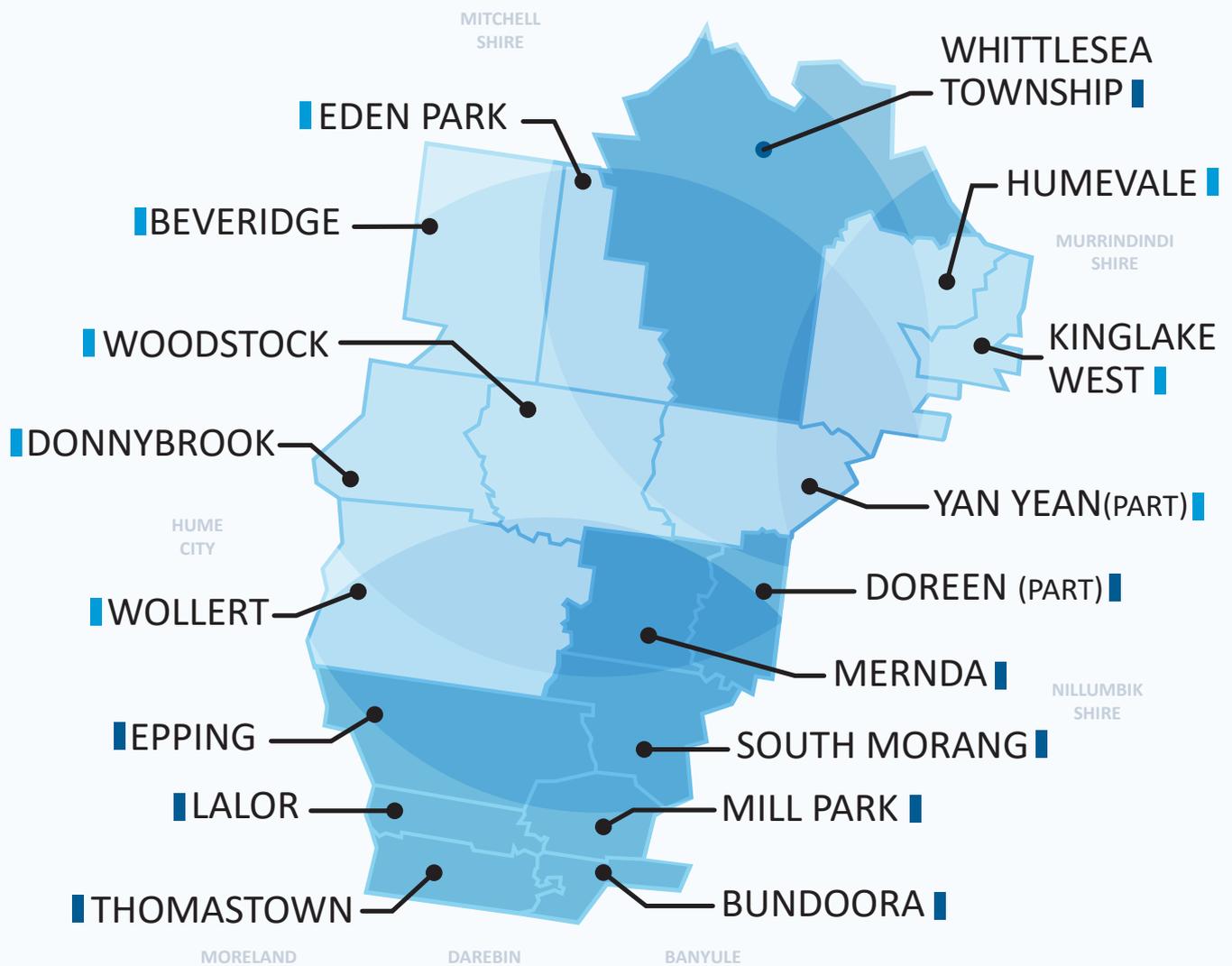


Rural areas include:

- Beveridge (part)
- Donnybrook
- Eden Park
- Humevale
- Kinglake West
- Wollert
- Woodstock
- Yan Yean (part)



Figure 1: Map of City of Whittlesea Municipality



1.4 Context and Current Situation

Animal Management Services

The Animal Management Unit provides a broad range of services to ensure Council meets its legislative responsibilities regarding the management of domestic animals within the municipality. The unit is also responsible for ensuring the needs of the wider community are reflected through Council's domestic animal management policies, procedures and practices.

Council's domestic animal services include:



Providing advice to the community on domestic animal matters and promoting responsible pet ownership



Investigating of nuisance animal complaints and dog attacks



Attending to customer complaints



Managing Council's domestic animal collection and pound services contracts



Maintaining a domestic animal register and undertaking registration checks



Impounding wandering, unwanted or unowned cats and dogs



Providing administration and control of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs



Providing an after-hours emergency service



Registering and inspecting domestic animal businesses



Providing administration and inspection of excess animal permits

1.5 Domestic Animal Statistics

A high level summary of the current population and service numbers for domestic animals in the City of Whittlesea is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Current population and service numbers for domestic animals

Program/Service:	Service Level:
Identification & Registration	18,321 dogs 6,798 cats
Identification & Registration- doorknock campaigns	Renewal doorknocks are done from June -August where required, other doorknocks when time allows.
Domestic animal complaints	General complaints are generally acted on within 3 business days
Dangerous Dogs complaints	Dogs acting aggressively or that have attacked are acted on within 1 hour
Routine street patrols	Aim for 20 (30 Min) patrols per week between all staff
Epping Animal Welfare Facility	Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11am - 7pm Tuesday and Thursday 7am -3pm Saturday and Sunday 9am - 4pm
Animals impounded	2,457 in 2020/21
Animals seized or surrendered	13 dogs seized in 2020/21 due to dog attacks.
Animals surrendered	77 dogs and 77 cats were surrendered in 2020/21
Animals reclaimed	658 in 2020/21
Animals rehomed	1,133 in 2020/21
Animals euthanised	556 in 2020/21
Declared dogs	5 declared Dangerous Dogs 7 declared Menacing Dogs 4 Guard Dogs
Registered domestic animal businesses	11 in total 5 pet shops, 3 dog training facilities, 1 boarding establishment, 1 animal shelter and 1 pet day care
Microchipping and/or desexing programs	Lost Dogs Home Bus x3/year
After hours emergency service	Contained dogs up until 6pm, emergencies after this time (dog attacks, injured animal, livestock)

2. Training of Authorised Officers

In order to deliver animal services that meet the requirements of the Act, to the level that the community expects, it is crucial to ensure that all authorised officers are appropriately trained and have the opportunity to participate in a robust training program.

The community engagement program illustrated a growing community expectation that Council officers should be fostering partnerships, supporting community education initiatives and facilitating positive interactions with the community.

2.1 Context and Current Situation

Council's Animal Management Team has seven full-time animal management officers (AMOs), supported by a Team Leader and Administration Officer.

It is a requirement that all authorised officers have, at minimum, a Certificate IV in Government Statutory Compliance and Animal Control and Regulation or equivalent experience and undertake all Council required training programs, outlined in Table 3.

Each officer has an individual annual performance plan, which includes a section related to training and development. Plans are reviewed regularly, with training requirements and suggestions being updated at those times. Responsibility for ensuring that nominated training is completed is a shared responsibility for the individual officer and their supervisor.

Table 3: Authorised Officer training status - completed and in progress

Authorised Officer Training	No. Authorised Officers	
	Completed	In Progress
Certificate IV in Government Statutory Compliance & Animal Control and Regulation	3	1
Internal industry training – animal handling, animal assessment, statement taking, brief preparation, computer skills	7	
In-house training – management skills	1	
Customer service training – conflict resolution, telephone communication	5	
OH&S training – workplace safety	7	
OH&S training – Dog Bite Prevention Training	7	
Identifying Family Violence and Responding to Victim Survivors	4	
Authorised Officer Training- Additional	Completed	In Progress
Firearms training - Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	1	
Bureau of Animal Welfare – training and information days	7	
Municipal Association of Victoria – training and information days	1	

2.2 Our Planned Training for Authorised Officers

The City of Whittlesea planned a thorough training program for authorised officers to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the requirements of the Act and deliver service in a manner that the community expects. Table 4 shows the planned training for 2021-2025 and the expected timeframe of each.

Table 4: Planned training of Authorised Officers for the 2021-2025 period

Planned Training (2021-2025)	Expected Timeframe
OH&S <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with aggressive customers • Working in remote areas • Defensive driving 	Every 2 years or as new staff commence
Industry Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal handling • Animal assessment • Prosecutions • Statement taking • Evidence gathering 	Every 2 years for animal management As other training opportunities arise
Restricted Breed Dog Identification	Every 2 Years (DEDJTR)
Council e-learning opportunities	As per Council requirements
Customer Service	As per Council requirements
Identifying Family Violence and Responding to Victim Survivors	Every 2 years
Cert IV in Animal Control and Regulation	AMO staff are required to complete this course as part of their duties
Cert IV in Local Government (Regulatory Services)	AMO staff are required to complete this course as part of their duties
Investigations	As arises
Firearms Training	Every 3 months for authorised officers
Training on handling pets in emergency	As arises
Australian Institute of Animal Management	1 officer has membership, others as required
Management seminars/conference	As arises

2.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Ensure animal management officers have the skills necessary to support the community and effectively perform their regulatory role

Activity	When	Evaluation
Partner with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to roll out all training as outlined in Table 4, through joint training sessions	July 2025	% of officers completed training % of training implemented
Explore opportunities for ongoing training in partnership with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council	Ongoing	No. of training programs undertaken
Customer Service training to encourage positive interactions with community members	Every 2 years	% of officers completed training
Maintain a training register for individual officers detailing completed and proposed training	Annually	Review of training register
Investigate other available training courses (Animal Welfare Victoria, RSPCA seminars).	Annually	No. of additional training opportunities provided No. of staff
Explore a standardised induction process with the City of Darebin and Moreland City Council and sharing an induction template	July 2022	Induction process developed
Partner with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to develop an Animal Management Team Development Day	Annually	No. Animal Management Team Development Days delivered
Have a staff member undertake Mental Health First Aid training.	As opportunity arises	No. staff completed Mental Health First Aid training



3. Programs to Promote and Encourage Responsible Pet Ownership and Compliance with Legislation

Responsible pet ownership was a key theme that emerged from the community consultation. There was a strong desire from the community to address the attitude or behaviour of owners, welfare concerns for cat and dogs, veterinarian and pound practices and developing partnerships with community groups and advocacy groups.

3.1 Context and Current Situation

Council provides information and advice to the community regarding responsible pet ownership and has a number of initiatives and programs in place to encourage responsible pet ownership. Some of the programs include:

- Educating the community about responsible pet ownership, including the benefits of desexing, registration and microchipping.
- Off-leash dog park location map and listing on the Council website
- A Lost Animals in the City of Whittlesea Facebook page to help reunite pets with their owners.
- Temporary accommodation of residents' pets to support family violence victims or survivors in an emergency or crisis.

COVID-19 Impacts

COVID-19 has had significant impacts on the community, including animals. There has been an unprecedented demand to foster and adopt pets during stay at home orders.

With many community members adopting and acquiring puppies and obedience training and puppy classes not available, dogs have not undergone training and missed opportunities to socialise. Dogs may have not coped with the changes COVID-19 brought such as lack of socialisation, stress and disrupted routine resulting in behavioural issues. This may lead to issues that will need to be addressed during the life of this Plan.

Education Initiatives

Council recognises that education and information is critical to encouraging responsible pet ownership.

Whilst Council currently undertakes a series of educational initiatives, we plan to increase our focus on education over the next four years, including:

- Providing opportunities for the public to meet our Animal Management Officers and find out about local animal services, including at dog parks and community markets and events;
- Presenting an annual pet expo in partnership with Moreland City Council and the City of Darebin;
- Hosting online information webinars;
- Partnering with registered dog trainers to present demonstrations;
- Conducting a responsible pet ownership in schools program;
- Microchipping events; and
- Using social media to run campaigns about responsible pet ownership.

Dog Off-leash Area Policy and Management Plan

In 2016 Council adopted its Dog off-leash Area Policy and Management Plan to provide direction for the establishment and operation of off-leash areas within the municipality. Council recognises off-leash areas as a valuable asset providing physical and mental health benefits to the community, both residents and dogs.

A full list of dog off-leash parks can be found on the Council's website.

Cat Curfew

During the community consultation there were 144 mentions regarding the introduction of a cat curfew from City of Whittlesea participants, representing 8% of all feedback from residents.

The introduction of a cat curfew was mentioned in response to participants being asked about their cat concerns in the local area and what Council could do to address the concern or how Council could improve its animal management services for the benefit of the general community and for its pet owners. Feedback suggested that the introduction of a cat curfew would address issues such as roaming cats, the impact of cats on wildlife, cats leaving waste on people's property, fighting cats and the number of stray cats in the community.

Further community engagement is proposed to ascertain whether the community wants a cat curfew in the City of Whittlesea.

City of Whittlesea participants were asked what behaviour they observed of cats in the community in the online survey, the top three responses were cats in the street at night, cats preying on wildlife and disturbed gardens beds due to cat activity.

Community education was a key priority highlighted throughout the community consultation and an important Council role in domestic animal management. The top community education priority topic for City of Whittlesea was cat curfews in your area with 404 participants selecting this topic.

3.2 Our Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures



Orders:

- Section 23 of the Domestic Animals Act 1994
- Section 26 Domestic Animals Act 1994



Orders: Local Laws:

- General Municipal Law 2015 Part 6



Policies and Procedures:

- Dog Off-leash Area Policy & Management Plan 2016 to 2026 - sets direction and provides a guide for decision-making for provision of off-leash areas
- Domestic Animal Welfare Support Policy 2019 - temporary care of domestic animals (pets) owned by residents at risk of or in a crisis due to family violence
- Animal Registration and Refunds Policy 2019

3.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Introduce mandatory cat desexing

Activity	When	Evaluation
Community consultation regarding the introduction of mandatory cat desexing for new registrations	March 2022	Support for the introduction of mandatory cat desexing
Develop draft mandatory cat desexing policy/local laws for new registrations to be desexed (subject to community consultation supporting the introduction of mandatory desexing for new cat registrations)	July 2022	Policy endorsed
Partner with local vet clinics to promote the benefits of desexing cats	December 2022	No. partnerships developed No. information packs developed
Develop a discounted pet desexing program for concession card holders	Ongoing	No. program participants

OBJECTIVE 2: Explore the feasibility of introducing of a cat curfew

Activity	When	Evaluation
Community consultation regarding the introduction of a cat curfew	March 2022	Support for the introduction of a cat curfew
Develop draft cat curfew policy/local law (subject to community consultation supporting the introduction of a curfew)	July 2022	Draft policy/local law developed
Promote the benefits of containing cats to their owner's property using materials developed through Safe Cats, Safe Wildlife and include the resource as part of the information pack given with registrations	Ongoing	Facebook likes, shares and engagement Webpage clicks and time spent on page
Provide cat owners with resources and information to assist with transitioning their cat to a stay at home lifestyle (subject to community consultation)	Prior to curfew – late 2022	Feedback from the community
Provide DIY cat enclosure workshops and information including an online video	Biannually from 2024/2025	No. participants Feedback received
Audit the amount of cat cages available to residents and see if supply is sufficient to meet need	Annually	Number of requests for cages vs number of cages available

OBJECTIVE 3: Promote responsible cat and dog ownership

Activity	When	Evaluation
Partner with the City of Darebin, Moreland City Council and local dog training businesses to encourage puppy/dog training and behaviour correction	Ongoing	No. participants
Develop a social media plan to promote various elements of responsible pet ownership, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Picking up after your dog The importance of socialising and training dogs Mandatory cat desexing (subject to community consultation) What to do if you find a lost pet Keeping cats out of other people's property How to use off-leash dog parks responsibly Responsibilities of owning a greyhound When and how to muzzle your dog Identifying when a dog is stressed or threatened How to choose the right type of dog to suit your family/lifestyle How to report dog attacks and potential outcomes if your dog attacks. 	Annually	Facebook likes, shares and engagement Webpage clicks and time spent on page
Run a campaign about the importance of responsible cat ownership, sending information or QR codes for information out with renewal notices	Annually	No. complaint numbers No. participants
Develop a 'meet your Animal Management Officer' program, including events at dog parks and stalls at community markets and events	October 2024	No. recommendations and improvements
Webinars to share information on responsible pet ownership topics through partnerships with Moreland and Darebin as well as vets, Wildlife Victoria, Rescues and Shelters	July 2023	No. participants
Host an event in partnership with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to bring together pet stakeholders (Vets, Rescue Groups, shelters, dog trainers) to share information and services with the community	Annually	No. participants
Partner with local veterinary clinics to share information with pet owners about responsible pet ownership	Ongoing	No. vet participants

4. Programs to Address Overpopulation Rates and any High Euthanasia Rates

The overpopulation of cats and dogs is an issue that presents challenges in the community such as impacts on wildlife, people and other cats and dogs. There are also impacts on the welfare of cats and dogs if they are stray, semi-owned, or malnourished due to limited capacity of owners to care for them. Particularly the overpopulation of cats leads to challenges with rates of euthanasia within the stray cat population due to low rehoming rates.

During the community engagement program, the community and key stakeholders expressed concern regarding euthanasia rates, as well as a desire to explore mandatory desexing to address overpopulation issues. The population and euthanasia rates are demonstrated in Table 5. There has been a 15% decrease in the number of cats impounded between 2019/20 and 2020/21, and a slight increase in the number of cats returned to their owners or rehomed. The number of impounded cats euthanised remained the same at 30% for 2019/20 and 2020/21.

4.1 Context and Current Situation

Table 5: Numbers of cats and dogs impounded and subsequent outcomes

	2017/2018*	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Dogs				
Impounded	788	921	888	759
Returned to owner	560	621	539	516
Euthanasia (feral or unsafe to rehome)	51	80	83	67
Rehomed	177	181	180	108
Cats				
Impounded	1,416	2,035	2,007	1,698
Returned to owner	71	82	122	142
Euthanasia (feral or unsafe to rehome)	314	521	610	489
Rehomed	649	1,054	1,289	1,025

* Data from 2017/2018 is from October 2017 – June 2018

Rates of dog euthanasia are much lower due to the higher rates of dogs being reunited with their owners or being rehomed compared to cats, however there was a slight decrease of impounded dogs being euthanised in 2020/21 from 2019/20.

While more than 67% of impounded dogs were returned to their owners in 2020/21, only 8% of impounded cats were returned to their owners.

The number of impounded cats and dogs increased significantly in 2018/19 and saw a decrease in 2019/20 and further decrease in 2020/21.

Mandatory Desexing of Cats

There was strong support from the community for mandatory desexing of cats where the owner is not a registered breeder, 83% of survey respondents.

A further 13% of City of Whittlesea respondents “*somewhat*” supported the proposal but did have some concerns; these were:



Making cat desexing strictly mandatory rather than by owner choice (n=13)



That the cost of desexing is expensive (n=9)



Other reasons - such as should allow cats to have one litter only (n=9)



Desexing should be done later in the cat's life (n=4).

For context, 95% of registered cats are desexed, whilst 70% of registered dogs are desexed. This indicates that semi-owned cats may be more significant contributors to overpopulation.

Animals that are not reclaimed are offered for rehoming if they meet temperament and health requirements. Animals may be euthanised if they have an untreatable disease or if they have temperament issues that pose a risk to the community.

City of Whittlesea's current educational and promotional activities include:

- Providing relevant information via website, social media and Council publications
- Providing prompt proactive and reactive enforcement activities.

4.2 Our Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures



Orders: Local Laws:

- City of Whittlesea General Local Law of 2015- Part 6



Compliance Activities:

- Free use of cat traps for residents and businesses
- Cat trapping programs in public areas
- Personalised cat trapping programs for residents who are unable to do it themselves
- Attendance and assistance with situations of animal hoarders
- Excess animal permit system to manage the number of animals per property



4.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: To decrease the number of stray, abandoned and unwanted cats

Activity	When	Evaluation
Partner with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to seek partnership/funding to conduct a mobile desexing program	As grant funding is available	No. participants
Operate a desexing voucher or booking system through Epping Animal Welfare Facility, local clinics, Lost Dogs Home, MADI van	2021/22	No. participants
Partner with City of Darebin, Moreland City Council and mental health support services to develop a strategy to manage cat hoarding	By December 2024	Cat hoarding strategy developed

OBJECTIVE 2: To minimise the number of animals euthanised

Activity	When	Evaluation
Encourage partnerships between shelter and rescue groups, through 84Y agreements	By July 2022	No. partnerships
Partner with other Council teams to provide support to community members in caring for their pets	Ongoing	No. instance of support No. internal partnerships
Partner with City of Darebin, Moreland City Council, EAWF, Cat Protection Society, Maneki Neko and Lost Dogs Home to provide a neonatal program	2022	Program developed No. cats supported

5. Registration and Identification

Registration and the requirement to be microchipped is a legislative requirement, it provides Council with an understanding of the level of pet ownership and allows for the development of relevant services and programs. It also assists in the safe and quick return of any lost cats and dogs to their owners.

In Victoria, local councils are responsible for managing pet registrations on behalf of the Victorian Government, including setting and collecting annual registration fees.

There were key suggestions provided on registration and identification through the community engagement program; around ensuring the registration process is easy and there is help available, increasing education on the benefits of registration and providing cost incentives.

5.1 Context and Current Situation

There are currently 18,321 registered dogs and 6,798 registered cats in the City of Whittlesea, as shown in Table 6. It is difficult to capture data on the actual ownership population of animals, as we know that not all cats and dogs are registered.

There has been a significant increase in the number of cats and dogs registered in 2020/21, 36% in cats and 11% in dogs. This could be due to the Covid-19 lockdowns where there was a surge in the demand for pet purchase and adoption.

Concession rates for registration were accessed by 21.5% of total registrations of dogs and 25% of total registrations of cats.

Table 6: Registration and microchipping numbers of cats and dogs

	Dogs	Cats
Registration Numbers	18,321	6,798
New	1,602	782
Renewal	16,719	6,016
Concessions	3,947	1,693
Offenses/prosecutions for unregistered animals	501 for cats and dogs combined	



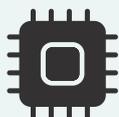
Council provides the following educational and community awareness activities:



Providing half price registrations for new applicants from 10 October each year until 9 April



Following up registrations for cats and dogs purchased from pet shops and shelters



Utilising microchip scanners on patrols



Providing first year free registrations for animals rehomed from animal rescue group organisations



Providing promotional material and reminders via postal mail; text messaging; officers on patrol; corporate communications such as the Local News newsletter, local newspapers and 'Messages on Hold'; website; Customer Service Centres



Requiring all domestic animal businesses to carry registration application forms

5.2 Our Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures



Local Laws:

- City of Whittlesea General Local Law of 2015- Part 6



Compliance Activities:

- Annual registration renewal follow up and audit
- Doorknocking programs throughout the municipality
- Proactive patrols of parks and public open spaces
- Inspections of excess animal permits
- Property inspections following information received from the public
- Investigating all nuisance animal complaints including detecting unidentified animals
- Enforcement of legislation.

5.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1:

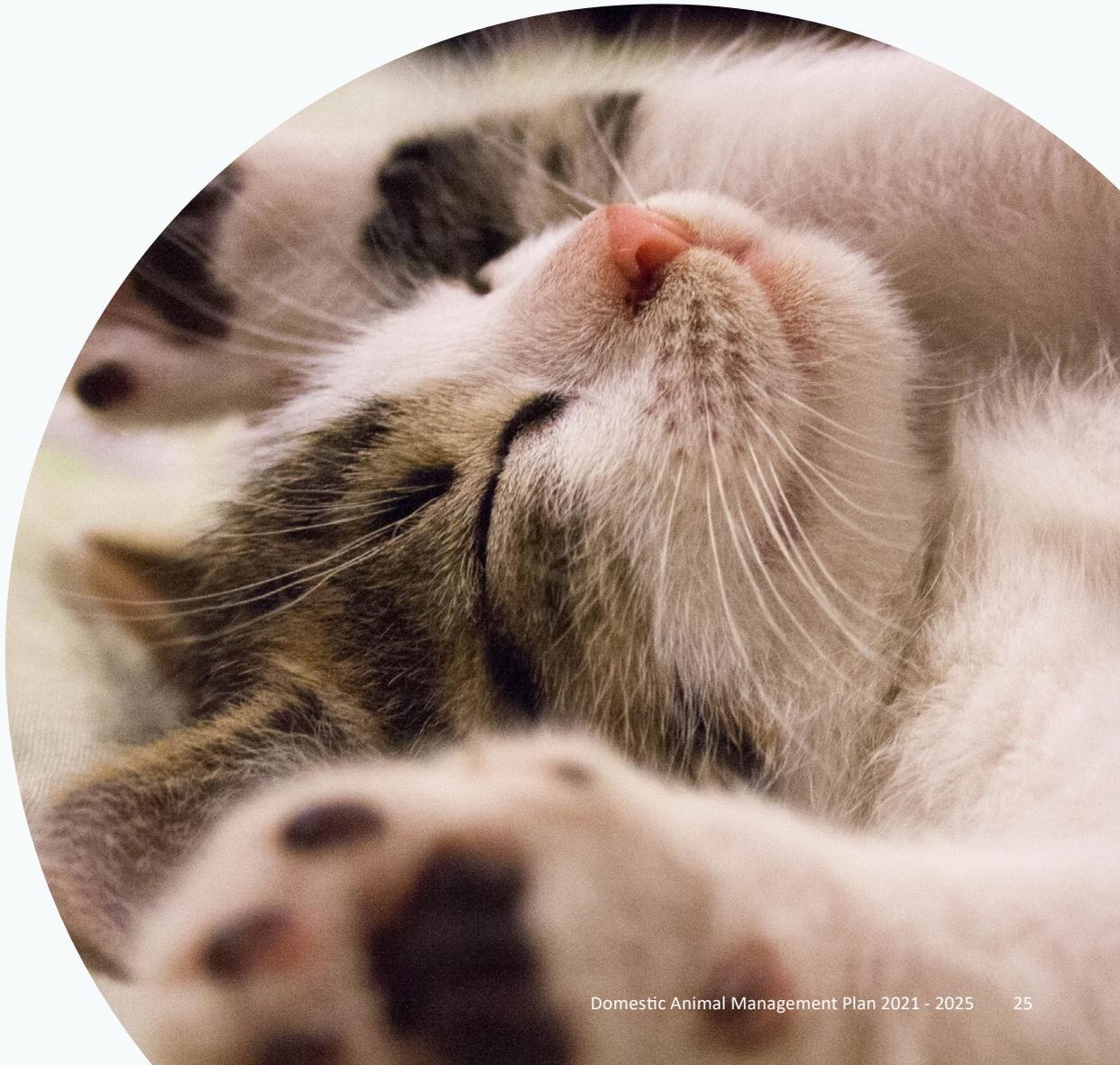
Increase the number of cat and dog registrations by 10% by December 2025

Activity	When	Evaluation
Advocate to the Victorian Government to set consistent registration fees across all 79 Victorian councils	2021/22	No. recommendations developed/ implemented
Promote registration through annual door knocks and communications e.g variable message boards, a-frames, decals on vans	Annual	No. door knocks undertaken No. pets registered through door knock
Partner with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to provide information on registration and microchipping in multiple languages	June 2024	No. of translated resources provided
Consider introducing a microchipping discount scheme	2024/25	No. of stakeholders engaged
Introduce 84Y agreements with vets to complete registrations and return animals to owners through microchip scanning	July 2022	No. of registrations No. of animals diverted from impoundment
Review the Animal Registration and Refund Policy to consider reduced registration rates and the feasibility of incentivising animal registration by waiving the fee for the first year of registration (subject to Victorian Government advocacy outcome)	2022	No. recommendations developed/ implemented
Promote registration discounts and concessions available for desexing and microchipping animals	Annual	No. of discounts/ concessions used
Form agreements with partners and rescue groups to complete Council registration at adoption time	July 2022	No. partnerships No. registrations through partners
Explore opportunities to partner with real estate agents to advise Council when a new pet moves into the City of Whittlesea	2022/23	No. partnerships No. registrations through real estate agents

OBJECTIVE 2:

Review the effectiveness and ease of use of the online registration system

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct a survey with online users to seek feedback on the ease of use of the system	October 2023	No. participants
Undertake a Council-led review of the system based on feedback	February 2024	No. recommendations developed/implemented
Promote improvements to the registration system	July 2024	No. promotions and reach



6. Nuisance

Community feedback demonstrated key nuisance themes for the community, particularly relating to barking dogs, cat and dog waste, cat and dog impacts on wildlife, issues with dogs in open space and cats out at night. Council has a role in protecting the community from unnecessary nuisance from cats and dogs through their services and community education.

6.1 Context and Current Situation

The data in Table 7 illustrates the number of contacts received by Council from customers in relation to nuisance caused by cats and dogs. While complaints to Council about barking dogs, dogs at large and cat cage requests have all declined in 2020/21, dog attacks and rushes have increased in that time.

It could be surmised that the increase in residents working from home (due to COVID-19 lockdowns) has had a positive impact on cats and dogs while owners are at home during the day. The increase in dog attacks could be explained by the fact more residents are walking their dogs in parks and encountering other dogs, contributing to an increase in incidents in the past year, however it is important to note that the rate is consistent with the 2018/19 period.

Table 7: Cat and dog complaints to Council from 2018/19 to 2020/21

Nature of Complaint	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Barking dogs	231	215	165
Domestic animal pick up	1,439	1,474	1,805
Dogs at large	301	265	253
Cat cage requests	431	531	468
Dog attacks and rushes	152	138	153
Animal violations (includes unregistered dog/cat, defecating, off-leash in park/reserve and excessive animals)	1,846	*761	1278

* New system was implemented - figure may not be comparable to other years

Council's current educational and promotional activities include:

- Providing information and advice on methods for resolving nuisance in the community.
- Encouraging complainants to speak to the owner of the animal causing the nuisance directly and as early as possible
- Providing a barking dog diary and noise nuisance complaint form.
- Providing prompt proactive and reactive enforcement activities and proactively patrols parks and open spaces within the municipality.
- Providing eight fully fenced off-leash dog parks across the municipality

6.2 Our Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures



Local Laws:

- City of Whittlesea General Local Law of 2015- Part 6



Policies and Procedures:

- Noise complaints- procedure
- Trapping programs- procedure
- Barking dog- policy and procedure
- Excess animal permit system

Current Compliance Activities:



The Animal Management team currently responds to complaints and undertakes investigations, infringements and, when necessary, prosecutions. In the first instance, education and prevention are more effective ways of dealing with these matters rather than enforcement.

Council staff patrol on and off-leash areas in parks and nearby streets weekly, including weekends and evenings during daylight savings. They provide education and enforcement of local laws to reduce the incidence of animal nuisance and dog attacks.

6.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Reduce the number of nuisance complaints that arise in the Municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Explore running Council run dog training through a procurement process	May 2024	No. of complaints pre and post No. of participants
Explore the use of mountain bikes to increase patrols in off-leash areas	2023/24	No. patrols No. fines
Partner with Moreland City Council, the City of Darebin, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Merri Creek Management Committee and other key stakeholders to review signage at dog parks, ensuring consistent messaging about dog owners' responsibilities	2023/24	No. signs
Promote exercising dogs to reduce barking complaints	Quarterly	No. barking complaints

OBJECTIVE 2:

Reduce the number of instances of dog faeces being deposited in public space

Activity	When	Evaluation
Partner with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to develop a responsible pet ownership resource regarding dog waste in the community	Late 2023	No. complaints
Audit dog waste bins across the municipality and consider providing biodegradable bags	2023/24	No. dog waste bins installed No. biodegradable bags used
Implement signage around cleaning up after your dog in public spaces. Explore the use of footpath decals	2023/24	No. complaints No. signs implemented

OBJECTIVE 3: Make it easier to report animal management issues to Council

Activity	When	Evaluation
Consider the feasibility of developing a smart phone app for community reporting of domestic animal management issues	2025	No. recommendations developed/ implemented
Engage with service users to evaluate the ease of reporting animal management issues to Council	October 2023	No. participants
Consider purchasing a recording device to provide independent proof of dog barking	2022/23	No. participants
Explore using a service such as Barkup! to manage barking complaints	2022/2023	No. barking complaints Feedback from users

7. Dog Attacks

Dog attacks against people and other animals, unfortunately, do occur in the local area. Community feedback indicated public dog parks are a particular area of concern and owner behaviours and understanding of responsibilities needs to be addressed.

7.1 Context and Current Situation

Over the past year (2020/21) Council has responded to, or been alerted to 153 dog attack complaints of varying severity. There are currently 16 dogs that are declared as dangerous or menacing in the City of Whittlesea. Complaints are reported by email, phone or online. A total of eight matters proceeded to court.

Table 8: Dog attacks in City of Whittlesea

	Information	Number
Dog attacks	Varying severity	153
Declared dogs	Current dangerous/menacing	16
Reporting systems	Email/Phone/Online	153
Complaints	Dog attack complaints	153
Prosecutions	Matters proceeding to court	8

Current activities undertaken by Council to minimise the risk of dog attacks on people and animals include:

- Providing community education about dangerous/restricted breed dogs and containment of dogs;
- Providing proactive park and street patrols;
- Contacting dog owners to provide information or follow-up;
- Inspecting properties where declared dangerous and restricted breed dogs reside;
- Responding promptly to complaints about dog attacks; and
- Investigating dog attack reports and taking an appropriate course of action.

7.2 Our Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures



Orders:

- Prohibiting exercising of dogs off-leash, other than in designated places;
- Designating eight off-leash dog parks.



Policies and Procedures:

- Investigation of dog attacks and rushes-procedure
- Dealing with dogs that have been proven to rush or attack- procedure.



Current Compliance Activities:

- Annual registration renewal follow ups
- Proactive park and street patrols
- Inspections of properties where dangerous and restricted breed dogs reside
- Prompt response to complaints (within one hour)
- Door-knocking to identify unregistered animals
- Enforcement in relation wandering dogs, attacks and rushes
- Consistent use of declaration/destruction powers.



7.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Decrease the number of confirmed dog attacks in the community

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review the safety and security of dog off-leash parks in the municipality, consider the standard design of fences	2023	No. recommendations developed/implemented
Explore the installation of CCTV at dog off-leash parks	2023	No. of CCTV cameras implemented
Provide proactive and visible patrols at dog off-leash parks	2021 and ongoing	No. attacks/rushes in on-leash vs off-leash No. official warnings/PINS issued
Educate children in local schools on the importance of responsible pet ownership	Annually from 2024	No. school children educated

OBJECTIVE 2: Increase community awareness of how to report dog attacks

Activity	When	Evaluation
Customer service review to measure customer service satisfaction, including timeliness, professionalism and responsiveness when dealing with dog attacks	June 2025	Customer service feedback received
Vets to notify Councils when they come across aggressive/risky dogs	2022/23	No. notifications received

8. Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs

The community's understanding of what constitutes a dangerous or restricted breed dog may not broadly align with the classifications as per the Act, however it was clear from the community engagement program that there was some community concern about dangerous dogs in the community (particularly off-leash dog parks) and poor management by owners.

8.1 Context and Current Situation

The City of Whittlesea currently has 18 dogs with restrictions (Table 9). This is a decrease from July 2017 when there were a total of 28 dogs with restrictions housed within the City of Whittlesea. A total of 18 property audits were conducted regarding dangerous dogs during 2020/21.

Council administers and enforces provisions of the Act to identify and control dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs to ensure the safety of the community.

Table 9: Declared dogs in the City of Whittlesea

Information	Number
Dogs declared dangerous	5
Dogs declared menacing	7
Restricted breed dogs	2
Guard dogs	4
Total	18
Complaints received re: dangerous dogs	0
Courts cases re: dangerous dogs	0
Prosecutions re: dangerous dogs	0
Audits conducted re: dangerous dogs	18

City of Whittlesea's current education/promotion activities include:

- Providing fact sheets and Bureau of Animal Welfare brochures on dangerous/restricted breed dogs;
- Implementing educational activities at local events; and
- Providing information via the Council website, social media and traditional media.

8.2 Our Current Policies and Procedures

Council’s policies and procedures for dealing with dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs are conducted in compliance with the provisions of Council’s legislative powers under the Domestic Animals Act and Regulations.

Compliance activities:

- Annual inspections of premises housing dangerous and restricted breed dogs;
- Prompt response to complaints of suspected dangerous or restricted breed dogs (within one hour);
- Door-knocking to identify unregistered animals;
- Enforcement in restricted breed dog inspections; and
- Maintaining and providing details of dangerous dogs, restricted breed dogs and menacing dogs on the Victorian Declared Dog Registry (VDDR).

8.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Identify and register all declared dogs in the City of Whittlesea

Activity	When	Evaluation
Cross-reference microchip databases with current Council registration database to identify potential restricted breed dogs	Ongoing	No. dogs recorded
Ensure all declared dogs are recorded on the Victorian Declared Dog Registry (VDDR) and the VDDR is kept up to date	Ongoing	No. dogs recorded

OBJECTIVE 2: Ensure all declared dogs are compliant with relevant legislation and regulations

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct random property inspections of declared dogs to ensure compliance	Ongoing	No. random property checks
Partner with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to develop a standard operating procedure for checking property compliance and what to do if non compliant	July 2025	Procedure developed
Partner with City of Darebin and Moreland City Council to develop a consistent approach to declarations using the same matrix	July 2025	Approach developed

9. Domestic Animal Businesses

All Domestic Animal Businesses must register with their local council. Under the Domestic Animals Act 1994, councils have the authority to:

- refuse registration of a business if they fail to comply with the legislation and relevant code of practice
- set special conditions on the registration of any domestic animal business.

9.1 Context and Current Situation

There are 11 registered Domestic Animal Businesses within the City of Whittlesea, comprising:

- Five pet shops;
- Three dog training establishments;
- One boarding establishment;
- One animal shelter; and
- One pet daycare facility.

There are currently no registered breeders within the City of Whittlesea.

Council identified one unregistered Domestic Animal Business and received one complaint. Table 10 provides additional information about Domestic Animal Businesses.

The provision of pound services is conducted by RSPCA (Vic) on behalf of the City of Whittlesea. The RSPCA also operates a registered animal shelter with Council from this facility. This shelter provides significant benefits in relation to animal welfare, convenience to the community and education in relation to animal ownership.

Table 10: Domestic Animal Businesses in the City of Whittlesea

Domestic Animal Business Statistics	No.
Registered Domestic Animal Businesses	11
Identified non-registered Domestic Animal Businesses	1
Complaints regarding Domestic Animal Businesses	1
Prosecutions related to Domestic Animal Businesses	0
Notices to comply related to Domestic Animal Businesses	0

Current educational, promotional and compliance activities include:

- Providing all Domestic Animal Businesses with the relevant Code of Practice;
- Bureau of Animal Welfare fact sheets on Domestic Animal Businesses available in Council offices, on the Council website and sent to registered businesses;
- Registration of all Domestic Animal Businesses;
- Conducting annual audits of each Domestic Animal Business within the City of Whittlesea;
- Follow up any non-compliance as required;
- Regular patrols for new/non-registered Domestic Animal Businesses; and
- Occasional unannounced inspections.

9.2 Our Current Policies and Procedures

- Domestic Animal Businesses must be registered annually with Council;
- All Domestic Animal Businesses are audited annually;
- Registration forms and information on Council website and at Council offices;
- Procedure regarding noise nuisance complaints from Domestic Animal Businesses;
- Any new businesses must be inspected before registration;
- Domestic Animal Businesses must notify Council when any animals are sold or given away so that Council can ensure registration.

9.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Identify and register all Domestic Animal Businesses in the municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Identify all businesses that should be registered DABs in the municipality and determine their registration status. Partner with planning to receive notification when a new animal related business is seeking a permit	As required	No. DABS registered (100%)
Investigate any report of unregistered Domestic Animal Businesses	As required	No. reports investigated (100%)
Audit rescue groups/foster carers in terms of housing requirements, similar to Domestic Animal Businesses (DAB)	2022/23	No. audits completed

OBJECTIVE 2: Annually inspect and audit all registered Domestic Animal Businesses

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct annual audits of all Domestic Animal Businesses	Annually	No. audits conducted (100%)
Where required, act promptly to address matters of non-compliance.	As required	No reports investigated (100%)
Investigate and act upon public complaints about Domestic Animal Businesses.	As required	No reports investigated (100%)

10. Other Matters

10.1 Context and Current Situation

The Epping Animal Welfare Facility (EAWF) was funded by Whittlesea, Darebin and Moreland City Councils and opened in October 2017. The operation of EAWF is managed by RSPCA, who have significant experience in animal care and welfare, with a strong focus on foster care, adoption and the rehoming of animals.

Impounded cats and dogs are housed at EAWF and kept for the statutory period during which time the RSPCA is required to make every effort to reunite the animal with its owner. RSPCA is contracted to provide animal management services on behalf of Council at the EAWF.

During the key stakeholder interviews there were concerns raised regarding the current practices of EAWF in terms of re-homing animals and euthanasia. There were suggestions to improve partnerships with community rescue groups to improve outcomes for animals.

10.2 Our Policies and Procedures

- Domestic Animal Welfare Support Policy
- The EAWF is operated by the RSPCA therefore their policies and procedures apply with respect to the management of animals impounded to the EAWF.

10.3 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Review the operation of the EAWF to ensure it is achieving best practice

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review rescue and foster programs provided	2021/22	Review completed No. recommendations developed and implemented No. animals rehomed or fostered
Undertake mid-term milestone review of the 10 year contract with RSPCA for the Epping Animal Welfare Facility	2021/22	Review completed No. recommendations developed and implemented
Review the Domestic Animal Welfare Support Policy	2023/24	Review completed



11. Annual Review of Plan and Annual Reporting

In line with the Domestic Animals Act, Council must review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and amend the plan as needed. The following activities outline how the Council will meet these requirements.

11.1 Our Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: Comply with Section 68A(3) of the Domestic Animals Act

Activity	When	Evaluation
Provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan	December 2021 and annually	Copy provided to Secretary
Review the Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan	Annually	Plan reviewed annually
Publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in Council's Annual Report	Annually	Evaluation report published
Provide progress reports through Council's 'health check' reporting	Quarterly	Quarterly progress reports
Council will undertake a major review of the plan after four years	2025	Major review undertaken





City of
Whittlesea