

## Report to the Future Melbourne Committee

Agenda item 6.4

### Draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022– 2025

16 August 2022

**Presenter:** Dean Robertson, Director City Safety, Security and Amenity

#### Purpose and background

1. The purpose of this report is for the Future Melbourne Committee to endorse for community engagement the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022– 2025 (DAMP) (Attachment 2).
2. The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act) requires councils to produce a Domestic Animal Management Plan which will be renewed every four years. The DAMP focuses on dogs and cats and registered domestic animal businesses within the municipality.
3. The DAMP will guide the City of Melbourne (CoM) in its service to the community, increasing the likelihood of animals being reunited with their owners, minimising the risk of dog attack and nuisance caused by animals and reducing the number of dogs and cats in shelters and potentially being euthanised.
4. The DAMP was due to be submitted to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions on 4 November 2021, however, due to the impact of COVID-19 on the ability to engage with the community, an extension was sought and approval granted to submit the plan by 1 November 2022.

#### Key issues

5. The 2017– 2021 DAMP has been evaluated and has contributed to the development of the draft 2022– 2025 plan.
6. CoM has recently completed community engagement on issues raised in a discussion paper designed to inform the development of the draft DAMP. The community engagement summary report and the discussion paper are attached (Attachment 3 and Attachment 4 respectively).
7. As has been highlighted through the development of the draft DAMP and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, pet ownership has significantly increased as has the demand for the animal management service, with competing demands for open space and a significant increase in dog attacks.
8. Community engagement and feedback highlights the need for an increase in the number of patrols conducted by the team, highlighting the need for more enforcement where people fail to meet their obligations as a dog owner in the CoM.

#### Recommendation from management

9. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
  - 9.1. endorses the draft 2022–2025 Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) for commencement of community engagement
  - 9.2. authorises the General Manager Community and City Services to make any further minor editorial changes to the draft DAMP.

#### Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 2 of 46)
2. Draft Domestic Animal Management Plan DAMP 2022 – 2025 (Page 3 of 46)
3. Community Engagement Summary Report Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2022-25 (Page 32 of 46)
4. Discussion Paper Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2022-25 (Page 35 of 46)

## **Supporting Attachment**

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### **Legal**

1. The report accurately identifies the relevant provisions in the Act. The DAMP is required to outline the services, programs and policies the Council have established to address the administration of the Act and the management of dogs and cats in its community.
2. The DAMP is a statutory plan that is required to be submitted to the Victorian Government every four years.

### **Finance**

3. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within the report. The draft plan has been prepared assuming that all initiatives will be funded within existing budgets.

### **Conflict of interest**

4. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a direct or indirect interest in relation to the matter of the report.

### **Health and Safety**

5. In developing this report, health and safety issues or opportunities have been considered, these include recognising:
  - 5.1. the positive effect dogs have on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the community.
  - 5.2. that an increase in dog off leash areas may result in an increase in incidents of dog attacks. The DAMP recognises programs and initiatives to minimise the risk of dog attacks.

### **Stakeholder consultation**

6. One round of community engagement was undertaken between 13 May 2022 and 5 June 2022 which sought feedback on issues identified in a discussion paper designed to inform the development of the DAMP.

### **Relation to Council policy**

7. This recommendation does not relate to any existing Council policies.

### **Environmental sustainability**

8. This proposal will not increase or decrease the consumption or generation of water, waste, energy or greenhouse gases.

## **Melbourne City Council**

### **Draft Domestic Animal Management Plan**

**2022-2025**

The City of Melbourne respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we govern, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong Boon Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge and honour the unbroken spiritual, cultural and political connection the Wurundjeri, Bunurong, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wadawurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin have to this unique place for more than 2000 generations.

We are committed to our reconciliation journey, because at its heart, reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, for the benefit of all Victorians.

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## 1. Introduction and context

### 1.2 Purpose of domestic animal management plan

Under Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act), every council in Victoria is required to produce a domestic animal management plan (the plan) which will be renewed every four years.

The plan is required to outline the services, programs and policies the council have established to address the administration of the Act and the management of dogs and cats in their community. The specific requirements are:

- a. Every council must, in consultation with the Secretary, prepare at four yearly intervals a Domestic Animal Management Plan.
- b. A Domestic Animal Management Plan prepared by a council must:
  - i. set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of this Act and the regulations
  - ii. outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the council's municipal district
  - iii. outline programs, services and strategies which the council intends to pursue in its municipal district to:
    - promote and encourage the responsible ownership and dogs and cats
    - 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 over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats
    - encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats
    - minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance
    - effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs and to ensure those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and regulations.
  - iv. 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 any further orders or local laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable
  - v. provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the council's municipal district that it thinks necessary
  - vi. provide for the periodic review of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.
- c. Every council must:
  - i. review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan
  - ii. provide the Secretary (person who is head of the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR)) with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan

- iii. publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

### **1.3 Associated legislation**

#### **Domestic Animals Act 1994**

The Act provides the foundation for the council's animal management service. Key features of the council's responsibilities under the Act include:

- registration and permanent identification of dogs and cats
- control of dogs and cats including particular controls for dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs
- registration and conduct of domestic animal businesses
- seizure of lost, stray or abandoned animals
- financial provisions
- appointment of authorised officers.

There are six mandatory codes of practices made under the Act which are overseen by council which relate to the operation of domestic animal businesses. Domestic animal businesses include breeding and rearing establishments, boarding establishments, shelters and pounds, pets shops, dog training establishments and greyhound establishments.

#### **Local Laws and orders**

Melbourne City Council's Activities Local Law 2019 requires dog owners to collect and dispose of their dog's excrement in public places and always carry a plastic bag or pooper scooper with them.

Melbourne City Council's order under Section 26(2) of the Act (the order) requires dogs to be leashed in public places except for designated off-leash areas. The order also requires that dogs are under effective voice or hand control when off-leash in designated areas, dogs are leashed within 20m of a children's playground area and prohibits dogs from entering designated areas.

The order will be amended in 2022/23 to require that dogs are also on a leash within 5 metres of a shared path (designated and identified for use by both pedestrians and bike riders) and within 20 metres of an outdoor fitness equipment area, a sports field or recreation facility during organized sporting activity (including training), the principle location of an organized public event or meeting, a river and creek or waterbody.

The following parks currently have designated off-leash areas:

- Clayton Reserve, North Melbourne
- Fawkner Park, South Yarra
- JJ Holland Park, Kensington

- North Melbourne Recreational Reserve, North Melbourne
- Princes Park, Carlton North
- Royal Park, Parkville
- Yarra Park, East Melbourne
- Gosch's Paddock, Melbourne
- Stawell St Reserve, West Melbourne

The following parks will be designated as off leash areas in 2022/23

- Eades Park, West Melbourne
- Kings Way and Moray Street Reserve, Southbank
- Point Park, Docklands (timed access)
- Riverside Park, Kensington (times access)
- Ron Barassi Senior Park, Docklands
- Wellington Park, East Melbourne (timed access)

Note, timed access means between the hours of 6pm and 8am daily, meaning the above parks will be designated off leash areas during those times.

Dogs are prohibited from entering designated spaces within Fawkner Park, JJ Holland Park and Royal Park.

### **Purpose of this plan**

The overarching purpose of this plan is to promote and ensure responsible pet ownership as that is at the heart of the animal management service. The City of Melbourne encourages responsible pet ownership and encourages owners to go above and beyond what is required by law in order to ensure a great quality of life for the pet, the owner and the community.

This plan will guide the City of Melbourne in its service to the community, increasing the likelihood of animals being reunited with their owners and reducing the number of dogs and cats in shelters and potentially being euthanised.

The plan will assist the City of Melbourne to promote increased livability in the municipality through minimising nuisance and possible danger created by some dogs and cats, by providing appropriate services and through promotion of responsible pet ownership. The plan will also ensure officers responsible for implementing the plan are skilled and trained to effectively deliver the service.

This plan focuses solely on dogs and cats.

## **1.4 Process applied in developing the plan**

The investigations the City of Melbourne undertook in preparing the plan are summarised in Table 1.

<b>TABLE 1: INVESTIGATIONS UNDERTAKEN IN PREPARING THE PLAN</b>	
Legislation, regulations, codes of practice	The <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> is the foundation for Council's animal management service. Developing this plan is an opportunity to review the City of Melbourne's animal management service to improve the outcomes achieved. The legislation is described on pages 2 and 3 of this plan.
Local laws and orders	The Council's local laws and the order relating to animals are described on page 4 of this plan. The plan is required to provide for their review.
Animal management data	The City of Melbourne's pet registration and customer request data was reviewed to identify trends, issues and possible priorities, which is referenced throughout this plan.
Existing services	Preparing the plan is an opportunity to reflect on the existing animal management services provided by the Council and consider possible improvements. The existing animal management service is referenced throughout this plan.
City of Melbourne profile	An understanding of the community profile will ensure the plan reflects the special attributes of the municipality. This is described in section 1.3 of this plan.
Community and stakeholder feedback	Community and stakeholder views were a core element in preparing the plan. Extensive feedback obtained has been incorporated into the plan where possible and appropriate. The community engagement process and feedback received is explained in detail below.
The planning context	The City of Melbourne reviewed relevant plans and strategies and their implications for this plan. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future Melbourne 2026</li> <li>• Council Plan 2021 - 2025</li> <li>• Asset Plan 2021 – 2031</li> <li>• Health and Wellbeing Action Plan 2021 - 2025</li> </ul>
Research and best practice	The City of Melbourne reviewed the latest research and best practice in animal management.
Funding	This plan has been prepared assuming that all initiatives will be funded within existing budgets.
Staff feedback	City of Melbourne staff were able to provide valuable input on trends, issues and possible priorities and initiatives. Input was obtained from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal Management Team</li> <li>• Open Space Planning Team</li> <li>• Parks Services Team (including Park Rangers)</li> <li>• Local Laws Team</li> <li>• Community Development Branch</li> <li>• Legal Services</li> <li>• Customer Relations</li> <li>• Community Services</li> <li>• Security Services</li> <li>• Waste and Recycling Branch</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellbeing.</li> </ul>
Partnerships	In preparing the plan, the City of Melbourne considered ways to partner with others to improve outcomes and achieve a better use of resources. Existing and future possible partners include the State Government, neighbouring councils, the Council's contracted animal pound service, other animal welfare organisations, veterinarians, microchip implanters, domestic animal businesses, obedience clubs and animal trainers.

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## 1.5 Feedback

In May 2022 the City of Melbourne went to the community to gather feedback for the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022– 2025. This involved an online survey on the Participate Melbourne website, with a discussion paper for the community's consideration and comments.

The community engagement opportunity was promoted through a range of digital channels that targeted pet owners and non-pet owners.

The City of Melbourne received 465 contributions to this engagement, which was a substantial increase on the 242 questionnaires submitted during the preparation of the previous plan in 2017. This is a clear indication and a reflection of the substantial increase in pet ownership and awareness and demand of the animal management service. This also reflects how the City of Melbourne has been engaging in recent years, with projects reaching more people. Of the 465 contributions, 82 per cent of people lived within the City of Melbourne, 83 per cent were dog owners, 23 per cent were cat owners and 81 per cent of all contributors used local parks, reserves and playgrounds.

Respondents were asked a series of questions to help identify matters they thought should be top priorities for the City of Melbourne to focus on in this plan. They were asked to rate the importance of specific issues or initiatives from 'not important' through to 'very important'. Key information obtained from the survey is as follows:

- 33 per cent of respondents stated they very often or always observe dogs off-leash where they shouldn't be and dog waste not being picked up.
- 10 per cent of respondents stated dogs annoy or intimidate people or other dogs.
- 57 per cent of respondents would like more promotion relating to dog leashing rules and responsibilities.
- 74 per cent of respondents feel it's fairly important or very important (59 per cent) for dog bags to be provided to owners.
- 68 per cent of respondents felt it was important for there to be a greyhound off-leash area, 35 per cent felt it was very important.
- 50 per cent of respondents felt it was important for officers to be present at community events.

- 51 per cent of respondents stated it is fairly important or very important that dog training events continue.
- 19 per cent of respondents stated they very often or always see cats in the street at night and a further 21 per cent stated cats are rarely or never kept inside during the day or night.
- 57 per cent of respondents feel it's fairly important or very important (44 per cent) for there to be a cat desexing program. 68 per cent strongly support a mandatory cat desexing.

Key themes arising from the qualitative feedback were:

- The management of dogs in public space is a critical priority. Specifically, the feedback highlights strong desires for focus relating to:
  - ensuring dogs are on-leash where they are supposed to be
  - the effective control of dogs when they are off-leash in an off-leash area
  - the presence of dog excrement in public places
  - more common and stronger enforcement of the rules.
- People recognise the benefits of pet ownership for their health and wellbeing - pets play a significant role in the lives of pet owners.
- There's a need to review infrastructure in parks and a call to improve what's currently provided, for example: dog bag dispensers, signs, bench seats, lighting, dog play equipment.
- There were queries about registration fees for indoor cats.

This feedback was considered when preparing the draft plan. A second round of community feedback will commence immediately after the endorsement of the draft plan which will include the draft plan and a short survey on Participate Melbourne.

## **1.6 Demographic and profile of Council**

On 30 June 2021 an estimated 169,860 people were living in the City of Melbourne, down from 183,628 at the same time in 2020. The estimated population resides in 94,600 dwellings. It is estimated that by 2030 the population could reach 262,242, however this has not taken into account recent trends as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2019 there were 87,300 overseas higher education students living or studying in the City of Melbourne, some of whom own pets.

The most recent data obtained from the By-Name List, a list that services record names of people experiencing homelessness, shows there are currently approximately 295 people experiencing homelessness with 119 people sleeping rough on the streets in our municipality, some of whom own pets.

As a capital city municipality, there is the added dimension of the daily influx of visitors and workers. Pre-pandemic, there were approximately 972,000 people, including residents, workers, students and visitors who access the city every day for work or play. Some of the visitors are dog walkers or owners from neighbouring municipalities.

These features of the City of Melbourne's population pose significant challenges for Council's infrastructure, green spaces and services. Challenges for the Council services include:

- continued increase in the number of registered animals (corresponding with population growth)
- competing demands on existing infrastructure including public parks and reserves
- high population densities with people and animals living in closer proximity to one another
- pet ownership amongst low income earners or those experiencing homelessness
- the high number of temporary residents and visitors to the city raises additional challenges for community education in responsible pet ownership.

## **2. Plans**

### **2.1 Training for authorised officers**

The Animal Management Team (the team) is coordinated by the Animal Management Coordinator who is supported by a senior animal management officer and two animal management officers. A business support officer supports the team with administrative duties. There is currently no plan to expand this team. The team delivers services relating to investigations and complaint resolution.

Animal pound services and after-hours emergency collection services are both provided by The Lost Dogs Home under contract until 30 June 2023.

The City of Melbourne is committed to ensuring the team is trained and competent in its duties and delivers an effective and professional service to the community.

All authorised animal management officers must meet the requirements of their position descriptions. The minimum requirement is a Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation or equivalent. All officers also undergo an induction program and are trained in relevant standard operating procedures.

All animal management officers undergo the following training:

- conflict resolution training
- customer service training
- animal breed identification, behavior awareness and handling
- restricted breed dog identification

- regular standard operating procedure and policy training
- lead audit training (only for senior officer and coordinator).

### 2.1.1 Our plan

#### Objective 1

Ensure the team is suitably resourced and skilled

Activity	When	Evaluation
Identify additional training opportunities to upskill officers.	Annually	Completion of annual goals and performance appraisals
Ensure all officers attend industry training and seminars.	Ongoing	Completion of State Government provided training Attendance at the annual Australian Institute of Animal Management conference Completion of annual animal behaviour and handling training
Develop a job share program within the City of Melbourne to train and upskill staff from other work areas.	2022	Staff participating in a job share program
Explore job or skill share programs and a working group with neighbouring councils to train and upskill each other, sharing learning and experiences.	2022	Staff participation in a job share program with a neighbouring council Communications with neighbouring councils
Review the number of full-time staff and the hours of operation ensuring it meets the community's expectations.	2024	Review completed and findings implemented
Align the service to the City of Melbourne's neighbourhood plans and provide a community development approach.	Ongoing	Adjustments made and service altered as required.

## 2.2 Registration and identification

All dogs and cats are required to be registered annually. Registered pets are also required to wear an identification marker when outside their premises. All dogs and cats being registered in Victoria for the first time must be microchipped before they can be registered.

### City of Melbourne's current data

The number of registrations for the last five years is displayed below. There has been a 64 per cent increase in total dog and cat registrations in the City of Melbourne since 2018, it is believed this has been due to the pandemic and is in line with other council's and cities.

The City of Melbourne has a rather transient population with many people living in the municipality for a short period of time – this means there is a large turnover in the number of pet registrations.

The recent community engagement for this plan identified that out of 384 respondents that owned dogs, over 85 per cent owned one dog, 13 per cent owned two dogs. 106 cat owners completed the survey and of these, 73 per cent owned one cat and a further 25 percent owned two cats.

**Table 1 – Pet registration statistics**

*Note, this data was taken at a similar point in time of the year and numbers do vary throughout the year*

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Dogs</b>	3292	3488	3942	4111	4750
<b>Cats</b>	1880	2166	2620	2933	3740
<b>Total</b>	5172	5654	6562	7044	8490

### City of Melbourne's current requirements, initiatives and procedures

These include:

- Reduced registration fees for pet owners who are concession/benefit card holders.
- Reduced fees are also available for particular categories of dogs and cats including those that are desexed, over 10 years old, and/or obedience trained (in compliance with the regulations).
- Since 2017, the City of Melbourne has utilised email and text messaging in the registration renewal process which has seen an increase in the number of registrations renewed on time.
- The City of Melbourne currently offers free registration for the first registration year for pets obtained from registered animal shelters.
- Annual follow up of registration renewals with a late fee being applied to incentivise payment on time and further follow up that may result in enforcement action.
- Reduction in fees as the registration year progresses, including the last two months of the registration period free for new registrations.

## City of Melbourne's current compliance activities

These include:

- Follow up of unpaid registration renewals. This includes a number of emails and text messages, phone calls and property visits, the application of a late fee and infringement notices.
- Targeted door knocks to check for unregistered pets.
- Patrols of parks and public places checking and ensuring dogs are registered.

### 2.2.1 Our plan

#### Objective 1

Improve the accuracy of the pet registration database

Activity	When	Evaluation
Contact microchip registries to obtain details of dogs and cats in the municipality that are microchipped. Check all animals are also listed on the City of Melbourne's pet registration database and follow up those that are not.	2023	Demonstrated increase in the numbers of pets registered with the City of Melbourne following microchip registry cross referencing exercise
Continue to promote the use of emails to receive pet registration renewal notices.	Annual	Increase in the number of registration renewal notices sent via email
Explore alternative methods to manage the annual pet registration process	2023	Methods explored and implemented Number of registration renewals paid on time
Review pet registration forms and registration renewal forms ensuring information is clearly displayed and easily understood.	2023	Number of pet registration renewals paid on time Review completed
Create a pet registration mapping database to better understand and plan for neighbourhoods.	2023	Map created

#### Objective 2

Increase awareness of the benefits of pet registration

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and update the City of Melbourne's web content.	2023	Review and update complete

Utilise social media and other media channels to promote the benefits of pet registration and responsible pet ownership.	Annual	Increase in the number of social media posts or other media content
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## 2.3 Nuisance

Dogs can cause a nuisance when they bark excessively, wander at large, are not properly controlled in parks and reserves or when their owner does not immediately remove their excrement from public places.

Cats can cause a nuisance when they trespass on neighbouring properties or are in public places.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen a significant increase in the number of reports relating to nuisances caused by animals, in particular barking dogs and leashing of dog issues. This is believed to be due to more people being home more often, providing opportunity for them to hear dogs bark. The pandemic has also seen people utilising local parks more often, creating greater competing use of these spaces – the adequate control of dogs may impact the way people experience our public places.

Barking dog reports have been at an all-time high, increasing from 123 in 2018 – 2019, to 160 in 2020 – 2021. Reports relating to leashing of dogs in public places (dogs not on leash where they are supposed to be) have more than doubled, going from 83 in 2018 – 2019 to 200 in 2020 - 2021.

The City of Melbourne recognises the need to balance the use of public places hence the recent review of off-leash areas, however for the benefit of all users of public places does not tolerate non-compliance of the order.

### City of Melbourne's current orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

These include:

- The order sets out the requirements for dogs in public places, including the requirement they be leashed at all times except when in designated off-leash areas. The order also prohibits dogs from entering certain areas. Dogs are required to be leashed within 20 meters of a children's playground or public barbecues.
- Melbourne City Council's Activities Local Law 2019 requires dog owners to collect and correctly dispose of their dog's excrement and to carry a plastic bag or pooper scooper with them that is suitable for the immediate collection of dog excrement when in a public place.

- The City of Melbourne provides information on their website about preventing nuisance barking, cats becoming a nuisance and the requirements to remove your dog's excrement.
- The City of Melbourne provides 52 dog bag dispensers throughout the municipality. The cost of bags and maintaining the dispensers is approximately \$48,000 per annum. Most dispensers need filling daily or every second day and the dispensers are frequently damaged through high use.

The Local Law is currently considered to be adequate.

The City of Melbourne does not have a large unowned or semi-owned cat population however, the City of Melbourne has recently become aware of a number of unowned or semi-owned cat colonies that are harbouring a number of cats. The cats in these colonies are causing a nuisance as well as suffering from disease or illness and contributing to wildlife predation. Programs have been undertaken to reduce or remove these colonies and works will continue to do so.

The City of Melbourne currently does not have any orders relating to the confinement of cats (curfews) and considers that this is currently unnecessary. Feedback received through the recent engagement suggests cat confinement is not currently an issue or common within the City of Melbourne.

### **City of Melbourne's current compliance activities**

These include:

- The City of Melbourne investigates all barking dog requests and mediates the majority of issues to resolution by providing education on responsible pet ownership and the benefit of socialisation of dogs. Complainants are encouraged to speak to the owner of the dog directly and as soon as possible.
- Proactive patrols and investigation to ensure dogs are not wandering at large and that dog owners are complying with the order and are being responsible with their dogs in public places.
- Funded dog training events to promote the need for dogs to be socialised and to increase awareness of responsible pet ownership.
- Education, investigation, enforcement and, when necessary, prosecution of offending pet owners.
- Promotion of responsible pet ownership including the benefits of desexing, socialisation and training of dogs on the City of Melbourne's website.
- Proactive cat trapping programs to reduce the number of unowned cats and responding to complaints about trespassing cats.

### 2.3.1 Our plan

#### Objective 1

Minimise the nuisance caused by dogs barking

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and update the information the City of Melbourne provides about preventing excessive barking and how they deal with barking dog complaints.	2022	Review undertaken and information updated as appropriate
Review the procedures for dealing with excessive barking.	2023	Review undertaken and procedures updated as appropriate
Develop a 'barking dog kit' that will assist and support customers, body corporates, building managers and dog owners through a barking dog issue.	2024	Review undertaken and procedures updated as appropriate
Investigate the use of technology to assist with barking dog investigations.	2024	Investigation completed

#### Objective 2

Minimise the number of complaints received in relation to dogs in public places

Activity	When	Evaluation
Include information about Council's Local Laws and order on the City of Melbourne's website.	Annually	Information audited annually
Continue to identify, monitor and patrol known hotspots relating to dog off leash and where excrement is commonly not removed.	Ongoing	Hotspots identified from customer service requests and observations of City of Melbourne staff Patrols focus on known hotspots
Complete a campaign promoting the leashing requirements for dogs.	2022	Campaign completed Feedback received from campaign and numbers of engagement
Review signs and other infrastructure in parks designating off leash areas and implement findings from the review	2023	Review completed and findings implemented

### Objective 3

Minimise the number of cat nuisance complaints

Activity	When	Evaluation
Provide education to cat owners and complainants about cat enclosures and nuisance issues.	2023	Reduction in the number of complaints relating to trespassing cats
Complete a campaign promoting the benefits of cat desexing and cat confinement.	2025	Campaign completed Feedback received from the campaign

## 2.4 Dog attacks

Sadly, there has been a significant increase in the number of reported dog attacks. Dog attacks have increased from 58 in 2019 – 2020 to 113 in 2020 - 2021 which has remained consistent in 2021 – 2022. This increase is of concern to the City of Melbourne, even if some of the increase reflects the higher incidence of reporting dog attacks following better community awareness and media coverage on the issue.

Dog attacks sadly and significantly impact the lives of all people involved. Victims are often left with significant financial expenses as a result of hospital or vet bills and suffer physical and emotional trauma as a result of dog attacks. Further, dog attacks seriously impact the lives of dogs – many victim dogs suffer lifelong trauma following an incident. If a dog attacks, it could have restrictions placed on it by the council in the form of menacing or dangerous dog declaration, or the dog may be ordered to be euthanized by the Court or council.

Dog attacks are serious, are common and need to be prevented as best as possible.

A review of recent dog attacks in the City of Melbourne found that most reported dog attacks and rushes occurred while the owner was with their dog. This demonstrates that some dog attacks are able to be prevented through appropriate care and control. In the 12 months between 30 April 2021 and 26 May 2022, of the 137 reported dog attacks, 11 of them (that were able to be investigated to the point of identifying and prosecuting an owner) were deemed to be serious in that the victim sustained injuries in the form of lacerations, loss of bodily function or in severe case, death to the victim dog.

Key initiatives to reduce the risk of dog attacks include in no particular order; desexing of dogs, early socialisation and training of dogs, ensuring animals are not permitted to wander at large, educating the community (particularly children) about bite avoidance and how to behave around dogs, educating the community and enforcing the requirements with respect to dogs accessing public places with their owner.

Many organisations and veterinarians provide puppy pre-school classes for owners of puppies. These classes help to socialise puppies around other humans and dogs.

The Victorian Government operates a number of programs designed to improve safety around dogs including:

- The Responsible Pet Ownership Program visits over 2,000 kindergartens and 800 primary schools annually promoting vital safety messages.
- The We are Family Program educates expectant parents and parents of children 0-4 years old on pet safety around young children. It is delivered through antenatal centers in 70 hospitals and 680 maternal and child health centers each year.
- Pet Town is an interactive learning tool educating kindergarten and primary school aged children on responsible pet ownership and dog safety.

### **City of Melbourne's current orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures**

These include:

- The order currently requires dogs to be on a leash not exceeding three metres in length in all public places except for designated off leash areas. The order also requires that dogs be leashed within 20 metres of a children's playground and a permanent barbecue area. Dogs are prohibited from entering designated spaces. These areas are shown on the City of Melbourne's website and are designated in parks by signs.
- Promotion of responsible pet ownership including the benefits of desexing, socialisation and training of dogs on the City of Melbourne's website.
- Information about the dangers, implications and ways to report dog attacks on the City of Melbourne's website.
- Communication with dog owners during parks patrols to ensure the appropriate control of dogs in public places.
- Desexing vouchers for concession/benefits cards holders (33 per cent discount).
- Free dog training events with professional dog behaviour trainers. These have not been active during the pandemic, but are returning.

### **City of Melbourne's current compliance activities**

These include:

- Prompt response to reports of dogs found to be wandering at large.
- Proactive patrolling of public places to ensure compliance with the requirements of the order with regard to dogs in public places.
- Use of established procedures and options available under the Act in relation to reported dog attacks and rushes including official warnings, notices to comply, infringement notices, declaration of a dog as menacing or dangerous, court prosecution or the seeking of an order for the destruction of the dog. These responses are not hierarchical and can be enacted simultaneously.
- Strong consideration of seizing dogs that have been involved in dog attacks in order to ensure the ongoing safety of the public and to prevent further incidents.

## 2.4.1 Our plan

### Objective 1

Increase public awareness of the prevalence of dog attacks

Activity	When	Evaluation
Consider opportunities to educate the community of the prevalence of dog attacks and how to report incidents.	2022	Number of education campaigns completed Feedback received through these campaigns
Develop information packs for owners of attacking dogs and victims of incidents.	2022	Information pack produced and distributed to key stakeholders and used where required
Identify vulnerable communities relating to aggressive dogs and develop an education program	2024	Communities identified Education program developed and implemented

### Objective 2

Minimise the risk of dog attacks in public places

Activity	When	Evaluation
Increase patrols of public places ensuring the appropriate control of dogs.	2022	Number of hours patrolled Number of non-compliances observed Number of infringement notices issued
Investigate the promotion and use of the Victorian Government's responsible dog ownership course.	2022	Investigation completed Benefits and uses identified Course promoted

## 2.5 Dangerous and restricted breeds

The Act has special requirements for dealing with dogs that have been declared either a dangerous or menacing dog and for dogs that are a restricted breed.

The City of Melbourne has no registered declared dangerous or restricted breed dogs and one registered declared menacing dog.

The City of Melbourne has received requests and information about declared dogs wanting to move into the municipality, however on investigation compliance with the requirements has been very difficult for owners given their short-term leases and property types and layouts not

being conducive to owning a dangerous or restricted breed dog, for example: the placement of an enclosure on a property is hard to achieve.

### City of Melbourne's current orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

There are special requirements and procedures to enact in the event that the City of Melbourne has a dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dog.

#### 2.5.1 Our plan

##### Objective 1

Identify any declared dogs in the municipality.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Cross-reference microchip database information with current pet registration database for potential declared dogs.	2023	Review undertaken. Any declared dogs identified are registered in accordance with requirements of the Act
Continue to provide information on the City of Melbourne's website about what is a declared dog.	Ongoing	Reviews completed and information updated as required
Take appropriate action should a declared dog be identified in the City of Melbourne's municipality.	Ongoing	Known dogs identified and regular audits conducted to ensure compliance

#### 2.6 Over-population and high euthanasia

The number of dogs and cats impounded in the City of Melbourne has significantly increased. In financial year 2016 – 17 there were 102 dogs and 219 cats impounded, compared to 175 dogs and 355 cats in calendar year 2021 – this is a 71 per cent and 62 per cent increase respectively. A review of the number of impounded animals has discovered the increased is largely attributed to animals being found outside the City of Melbourne municipality and delivered to veterinary clinics within the City of Melbourne.

Section 84D of the Act provides that an animal must be delivered up to the council of the municipal district in which it was found, therefore we are currently working with veterinary clinics and other councils for this to be appropriately complied with. Not only is there a cost associated with the impound of an animal, ensuring it is impounded to the correct pound with the appropriate information will assist the owner in finding the animal and being reunited with it.

This practice not only impacts our data and understanding of the presence of lost, stray and abandoned animals within the City of Melbourne, it is also a practice that costs the City of Melbourne time and money.

In 2021, 81 per cent of dogs were reclaimed by their owner while a further 13 per cent were rehomed to a new household. Those that were not reclaimed or rehomed were reported to have health and temperament issues, resulting in a euthanasia rate of 5 per cent.

In 2021, 16 per cent of cats were reclaimed by their owner while a further 48 per cent were rehomed to a new household. Those that were not claimed or rehomed were mostly reported to be unowned and deemed to be wild or feral, resulting in a euthanasia rate of 36 per cent.

The number of unwanted and unowned animals is a result of:

- overpopulation of dogs and cats
- animals being relinquished or abandoned
- animals unable to be reunited with their owner because of inadequate identification, including inaccurate microchip details
- the presence of feral cat colonies in the municipality.

The City of Melbourne is aware of several unowned and feral cat colonies in the city that are unwittingly exacerbated by residents who regularly feed these cats, making them difficult to contain.

Strategies to reduce the number of unowned and unwanted animals include:

- registration and microchipping to increase the number of lost animals that are reunited with their owner
- a collar or tag with the owners contact information on it
- desexing of animals to reduce pet overpopulation
- containment of animals to reduce the number of animals that are lost
- education in appropriate pet selection to reduce relinquishment and abandonment of pets
- education of prospective pet owners to consider choosing an animal from a shelter
- promotion of the presence of stray or lost animals on The Lost Dogs' Home website
- proactive trapping of feral cat colonies in the municipality.

### **City of Melbourne's current orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures**

These include:

- Since 1 July 2017 the City of Melbourne's pound service for dogs and cats has been provided under contract by The Lost Dogs' Home in North Melbourne. The Lost Dogs' Home seeks homes for as many lost and unwanted animals as possible.
- The animal management team returning registered lost and stray animals directly home to avoid them going to the pound.

- If animals are found outside of the City of Melbourne and delivered to a veterinary clinic within the municipality, returning the animal to the council of the municipal district in which it was found. This is a work in progress and requires more support from veterinary clinics and neighbouring councils.
- The City of Melbourne's website provides information on locating lost animals and what people should do if they have found a lost animal.
- Ensuring pet shops and animal shelters have sufficient information to give to new pet owners about responsible pet ownership.
- People purchasing an animal from an approved shelter are eligible for a free first-year registration.
- Desexing vouchers are available for pet owners with a benefits or concession card (33 per cent discount).
- Free dog training events with a professional dog behaviour trainers in the hope of reducing the relinquishment of animals.

Melbourne City Council's Activities Local Law 2019 places no restriction on the number of animals that may be kept on a property. It is not considered that such a restriction is warranted in the City of Melbourne.

The City of Melbourne currently does not have any orders relating to the confinement and mandatory desexing of cats. Feedback received through the recent engagement suggests cat confinement is not currently an issue or common within the City of Melbourne, however there is large support for the investigation of mandatory desexing.

### **City of Melbourne's current compliance activities**

These include:

- proactive park and street patrols to check for unregistered animals
- random and targeted doorknocks to check for unregistered animals
- prompt response to reports of dogs wandering at large, cats trespassing on private properties and cats appearing to be unowned
- monitoring of data associated with animals entering the pound
- returning animals to neighbouring municipalities if they were originally found there
- Proactive cat trapping programs of identified unowned or semi-owned cats.

## 2.6.1 Our plan

### Objective 1

Minimise the number of animals entering the City of Melbourne's pound

Activity	When	Evaluation
Continue to return registered animals to their owner if collected as stray or lost.	Ongoing	Increase in the number of animals returned to their owner without having to go to the pound
Continue to work with neighbouring councils and local veterinary clinics to ensure animals are delivered to the council of the municipal district in which they were found.	Ongoing	Number of animals delivered to veterinary clinics that were found outside of the City of Melbourne Number of animals returned to neighbouring councils
Work with local vet clinics to implement legislative changes allowing them to return lost, stray or abandoned animals to the owner.	2023	Number of animals returned to their owner from a vet clinic Number of vet clinics participating in this
Investigate Council making an order requiring the mandatory desexing of cats.	2025	Investigation completed and recommendations provided to Council

### Objective 2

Increase the number of animals that are reunited or rehomed

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and update the animal pound contract to minimise the number of cats and dogs euthanased that are able to be rehomed to reduce euthanasia of animals able to be rehomed to zero.	2022	Strategic service review conducted Outcomes incorporated into service specifications
Review and update all education material on the impacts of cat overpopulation and the benefits of obtaining a pet from an approved animal shelter.	2024	Review completed and information updated
Review and update all education material on the benefits of registering, microchipping and desexing pets.	2024	Review completed and information updated

Review pound statistics to monitor trends in the types of animals admitted to the pound and rates of return, rehoming and euthanasia.	Ongoing	Annual review completed
Increase social media activity relating to animals in shelters and the benefits of pet adoption.	Ongoing	Number of social media posts Engagement in posts Number of animals adopted from shelters

## 2.7 Domestic animal businesses

The City of Melbourne is responsible for the registration of a premises as a domestic animal business. These include:

- pet shops
- dog and cat breeding establishments where three or more fertile females and animals are sold (whether a profit is made or not) for an enterprise whose proprietor is not a member of an applicable organisation
- animal shelters and pounds
- boarding facilities including day care, overnight and home boarding
- dog training and rearing establishments.

All domestic animal businesses must be registered annually with their local council and comply with the appropriate mandatory code of practice. Business premises must also comply with other requirements including building, health, planning and local laws.

There are currently four registered domestic animal businesses in the City of Melbourne including one animal shelter and pound, one pet shop and two animal boarding establishments. Following the introduction of the reform to the dog breeding and pet shop industries, pet shops have ceased operating within the City of Melbourne and largely around Victoria. This reform and the focus on the management of domestic animal businesses had resulted in a decrease in the number of reports the City of Melbourne received about domestic animal businesses.

### City of Melbourne's current compliance activities

These include:

- annual scheduled audits of existing domestic animal businesses to ensure compliance with the relevant code of practice
- random audits of existing domestic animal businesses
- response to complaints from the community
- infringements and prosecutions of businesses that fail to comply with the relevant code of practice or works plans issued as a result of detected non-compliance

- searches and enquiries to identify unregistered domestic animal businesses
- promotion of registered domestic animal businesses on the City of Melbourne's website.

### 2.7.1 Our plan

#### Objective 1

Identify and register all domestic animal businesses in the municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Use existing standard work guidelines to search for unregistered domestic animal businesses.	Annual	Compare number of registered domestic animal businesses before and after the search
Publish and promote a list of all compliant domestic animal businesses on the City of Melbourne's website.	Annual	List maintained and updated where required
Ensure all newly identified domestic animal businesses are registered and compliant with the relevant code of practice.	As required	New domestic animal businesses are registered or action is taken for failing to register a business

#### Objective 2

Ensure domestic animal businesses comply with all legislative requirements including any new requirements introduced by the State Government.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Investigate and act upon public information about non-compliance.	Ongoing	All reports are promptly investigated
Implement audit schedule of businesses.	Annual	Audits undertaken as required
Review application and renewal processes to ensure businesses comply with requirements.	2023	Review undertaken

## 2.8 Other matters

### Diversity and inclusion

The City of Melbourne is home to a diverse population, that is proud and supportive of all people regardless of their age, gender, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, disability, income or location.

- Over 50 per cent of all City of Melbourne residents were born overseas and speak a language other than English at home, this includes around 140 cultures.
- The City of Melbourne recognise the value and strength of Aboriginal culture and is committed to their Reconciliation Action Plan.
- The City of Melbourne supports LGBTIQ+ communities and their allies and recognises their interest in the management of dogs and cats with 18 per cent of all respondents to the community engagement for this plan identifying with this community.
- The City of Melbourne is an organisation that supports families and recognises the need to support victims of family and domestic violence. Further, the City of Melbourne recognises the connection between pets and family and domestic violence and understands they too can become victims or be used as tools to inflict violence.

#### 2.8.1 Our plan

##### Objective 1

Embrace diversity and inclusion

Activity	When	Evaluation
Investigate the need for information to be published in multi-lingual formats.	2024	Investigation completed Material updated and produced
Review all website, promotional and registration material ensuring it is inclusive.	2024	Investigation completed Material updated and produced
Develop a process and ensure adequate training of officers in dealing with matters relating to family and domestic violence	2025	Process developed All officers trained to deal with and manage matters relating to family and domestic violence

### Planning for urban growth

The population of the City of Melbourne is growing rapidly. The implications for the animal management service include:

- potential increase in the number of dogs and cats

- increase in the number of households and dogs living in closer proximity to one another
- increasing demand for additional dog off leash areas
- greater demands on public open space by all members of the community, including dog owners
- animals and their owners need to be considered in planning for future public open space.

## 2.8.2 Our plan

### Objective 1

Ensure dog owners and dogs are considered in public open space

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review the mechanisms to ensure dog owners are considered in planning for future public open space.	2024	Review completed

### Emergency management

Planning for emergencies includes focusing on both the relief and recovery needs of the community.

Planning for and managing pets in emergencies has been at the forefront of people's minds as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and devastating 2019 Victorian and New South Wales bushfires. The animal management team played an important role in supporting pets and pet owners during this time. The team was responsible for walking dogs and taking pets to veterinary appointments while their owner was in quarantine or isolation, as well as operating an emergency relief center for people who evacuated from the Gippsland region as a result of the devastating bushfire.

The City of Melbourne's website provides advice on the preparation of personal emergency plans, access to real-time information about emergency incidents and procedures for dealing with a heatwave. The City of Melbourne also has a number of designated emergency relief centers that would be available in the event of an emergency.

The City of Melbourne can ensure appropriate information is available for pet owners before, during and after emergency events. This can include accommodation options for pets during an emergency. The City of Melbourne can also use modern technology to communicate with pet owners during such events, including SMS and social media. The City of Melbourne is an active member of the North-West Metropolitan Collaboration which consists of 14 councils that assist each other in preparing for and responding to emergencies.

Pet registration plays an important role in assisting agencies plan for and manage pets in emergencies.

### 2.8.3 Our plan

#### Objective 1

Be prepared for an emergency in the City of Melbourne

Activity	When	Evaluation
Collate information and procedures on planning and providing for pets during a range of different emergencies.	2023	Information collated and made available as appropriate
Ensure there is appropriate resources available to respond to an emergency.	2023	Resources reviewed and action taken on identified gaps

#### Community support services

The City of Melbourne works to balance the needs of all members of the community to use public space including those who are experiencing homelessness.

Pets provide companionship and comfort for those sleeping rough. However there are also concerns associated with animal welfare, risk of a dog attack or from pets being left unattended, the need for pets to be microchipped and registered and the means for people to travel beyond walking distance with their pet.

The City of Melbourne works closely with homelessness support agencies such as Launch Housing and the Salvation Army and provides support and referrals to appropriate care and support where required. The City of Melbourne is dynamic in its dealings with and support of pets owned by people experiencing homelessness, ensuring the pet and owner have the care and support they need to be healthy and compliant with relevant laws.

Some veterinary clinics provide discounted veterinary services and emergency animal boarding for pets of people experiencing homelessness.

Through this plan, the City of Melbourne will identify the concerns, needs and likely services required by pet owners and work with the Daily Support Team to provide appropriate responses.

## 2.8.4 Our plan

### Objective 1

Identify the needs of pet owners experiencing homelessness

Activity	When	Evaluation
Understand the needs of and services available for pet owners experiencing homelessness.	2023	Review undertaken
Prepare responses to each of the needs including identification of gaps in service provision.	2023	Procedures updated
Develop an information pack for pet owners who are experiencing homelessness.	2023	Information pack produced, given to support agencies and disseminated to pet owners experiencing homelessness

## 2.9 Annual reporting

Every Council must-

1. review its domestic animal management plan annually and if appropriate amend the plan
2. provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendment to the plan
3. publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

### 2.9.1 Our plan

#### Objective 1

Review and evaluate the plan annually in accordance with the requirements of the Act, amend where appropriate and complete required reports.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Establish an annual timeline and program for reviewing the plan and evaluating its implementation.	2022	The annual timeline and program for reviewing and where necessary updating the plan is appropriate and will ensure reporting requirements are met
Investigate the production and promotion of the plan	2022	Plan designed and produced Plan promoted via various platforms
Ensure all programs and procedures are reviewed annually where this is required in the plan.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective

Ensure each activity contained in the plan is evaluated for its relevance to and performance in meeting its applicable objective.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective
If any activities are not undertaken as planned, the review will note why the activity was not undertaken and consider whether it should be omitted from the plan.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective
If any activities did not meet expectations, the review will consider whether they should be omitted from the plan.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective
Complete an evaluation of the plan. Submit to the Council for approval along with proposed amendments to the plan. Update the plan as appropriate.	Annual	Evaluation completed.
Publish an evaluation of the implementation of the plan in the Council's annual report.	Annual	Evaluation published in the Council's annual report
If the plan is amended, submit a copy to the Secretary.	Annual	Amended plan submitted where required

# DRAFT DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-2025 SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

## Executive summary: Overview and Key Findings

From 13 May 2022 to 5 June 2022, the City of Melbourne undertook the first phase of community engagement in relation to the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022 – 2025 (DAMP). This involved an online survey on the Participate Melbourne website which included the publishing of a discussion paper to help inform feedback.

Of the 459 people who participated in the survey, 82 per cent of people lived within the City of Melbourne, 83 per cent were dog owners, 23 per cent were cat owners and 81 per cent of all contributors used local parks, reserves and playgrounds.

Respondents were asked to identify which topics needed more promotion in the community, how they felt about dogs and cats in the community, what services are important and general qualitative feedback about the current animal management services. They were asked to rank items from not important to very important.

The feedback received from our community supported what our data and staff is telling us, pet ownership in the city is rapidly increasing and there is a growing demand for the animal management service and other services that support pets. The key theme that arose was the need to manage and support dogs in public places.

## Background and Methodology

The Domestic Animals Act 1994 (The Act) requires domestic animal management plans to be prepared by every council in Victoria at four yearly intervals. Following a 12 month postponement of the completion of the plan due to two major projects that heavily influence the direction of the plan (dogs in open spaces project and the review and subsequent restructure the branch), community feedback was sought to inform the development of the draft DAMP.

The first of two rounds of community engagement on the DAMP was held from 13 May 2022 to 5 June 2022. Feedback was encouraged through an online survey published on the Participate Melbourne website, while information was also gathered through direct email to the animal management team. A discussion paper was published on the Participate Melbourne web page to help inform feedback.

The community engagement opportunity was promoted through a range of digital channels that targeted pet owners and non-pet owners. Social media was the strongest at reaching our community with 29 per cent of respondents accessing the Participate Melbourne website from a social media platform. 49 per cent of respondents accessed the Participate Melbourne website directly.

Key internal and external stakeholders were connected with directly and encouraged to contribute to the development of the draft DAMP.

### Engagement findings

465 contributions were received from 459 respondents, with two further submissions provided through direct email to the Animal Management team, including a submission from the Animal Justice Party.

Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire ranking matters from not important to very important and had the opportunity to provide detailed and further feedback through free text boxes.

Key information obtained from the questionnaire includes;

- 33 per cent of respondents stated it is very often or always dogs are observed off leash where they shouldn't be and dog waste is not picked up
- 10 per cent of respondents stated dogs annoy or intimidate people or other dogs
- 57 per cent of respondents would like more promotion relating to dog leashing rules and responsibilities.
- 74 per cent of respondents feel its fairly important or very important (59%) for dog bags to be provided to owners
- 50 per cent of respondents felt it was at least important for officers to be present at community events
- 68 per cent of respondents felt it was at least important for there to be a greyhound off leash area, 35 percent felt it's very important.
- 51 per cent of respondents stated it is fairly important or very important dog training events continue.
- 19 per cent of respondents stated they very often or always see cats in the street at night, a further 21 per cent stated cats are rarely or never kept inside during the day or night
- 57 per cent of respondents feel its fairly important or very important (44%) for there to be a cat desexing program. 68 per cent strongly support a mandatory cat desexing.

Key themes arising from the qualitative feedback were:

- the management of dogs in public space is critical and is the clear top priority
  - There is common and strong feedback about the desire to ensure dogs are on leash where they are supposed to be
  - There is a feedback relating to the effective control of dogs when they are off leash in an off leash area
  - There is also strong feedback relating to the presence of dog excrement in public places
  - This feedback calls for more common and stronger enforcement of the rules
- recognition of the benefits of pet ownership for people's health and wellbeing - pets play a significant role in the lives of pet owners
- there is a demand for more dog off leash areas, noting that this engagement is running alongside the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy which aims to increase dog off leash areas within the municipality and is yet to be finalized.
- There is a need to review infrastructure in parks and a call to improve what's provided eg: dog bag dispensers, signs, bench seats, lighting, dog play equipment.
- queries about registration fees of indoor cats

### Impact and next steps

The feedback received from our community supported what other data is telling us, pet ownership in the city is growing and there is a need for animal management services to educate and enforce responsible pet ownership in our community.

The Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2022-25 will be drafted with the feedback of the community in mind. The draft DAMP will be presented to the Future Melbourne Committee in August for endorsement for community engagement.



# Discussion Paper

## Domestic Animal Management plan 2022-2025

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## 1 Introduction

The City of Melbourne is preparing its Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2022-25, which guides our management of cats and dogs through this four-year period, and we need you to have your say on what you feel the key issues and objectives are, and what actions you'd like to see us take.

The Domestic Animals Act 1994 (the Act) requires Domestic Animal Management Plans to be prepared by every council in Victoria at four yearly intervals.

The City of Melbourne requested to postpone the submission of the DAMP due to two major projects that heavily influence the direction of the plan, being the review of dogs in open spaces project and a recent restructure of the branch responsible for the animal management service. This request was approved by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR).

This plan will guide the City of Melbourne in its service to the community, increasing the likelihood of animals being reunited with their owners and reducing the number of cats and dogs in animal shelters and potentially being euthanased. It will also assist the City of Melbourne to promote increased liveability in the municipality through minimising the nuisance and possible danger, created by some dogs and cats.

We'll be developing our draft plan with feedback from our key stakeholders as well as with you – our community. You can share your views with us by simply taking the online survey or directly via email to [animal.management@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:animal.management@melbourne.vic.gov.au). Please remember, whether you're a pet owner or not, it's important that we understand views from a range of members of the community.

We will also be benchmarking with neighbouring Councils and other capital cities to ensure we are in line with service standards and best practice.

Note: The plan relates only to the keeping of dogs and cats. Other animals kept as pets are not addressed in the Act.

## 2 Background to this plan

Part 5 of the Domestic Animals Act requires every council in Victoria to prepare, at four year intervals, a Domestic Animal Management Plan. The Act requires the plan to:

- set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the Council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of the Act and its regulations
- outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer the requirements of the Act in the Council's municipal district
- outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district
- promote and encourage responsible ownership of dogs and cats
- ensure that people comply with the Act, the regulations and any related legislation
- minimise the risk of attack by dogs on people and animals
- address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats
- encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats
- minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance
- effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and regulations
- provide for the review of existing orders made under the 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 dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable

- provide for the review of any other matter related to the management of dogs and cats in its municipal that it thinks necessary
- provide for the periodic review of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan

In addition, every Council must:

- review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan.
- provide the Secretary of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan.
- publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

The Domestic Animal Management Plan is required to be completed and with DJPR by Tuesday 1 November 2022.

You can access the City of Melbourne's [current Domestic Animal Management Plan](#) from the website.

### 3 Key facts

#### Population

At 30 June 2021 an estimated 169,860 people were living in the City of Melbourne, down from 183,628 at the same time in 2020. The estimated population resides in 94,600 dwellings. We estimate that by 2030 the population could reach 262,242, however this has not taken into account recent trends as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On an average weekday (pre-pandemic) around 972,000 people use the city as either residents, workers or visitors, some of whom bring pets in with them.

In 2019 there were 87,300 overseas higher education students living or studying in the City of Melbourne, some of whom own pets.

A street count in in 2018 revealed that almost 300 people were sleeping on the streets in our municipality, some of whom own pets.

*Please note, whilst care is taken to ensure this data and information is accurate and reliable (in the absence of recent information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics), the City of Melbourne cannot guarantee the accuracy of this. We note that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the City's population, including visitors and the data may not accurately reflect this impact.*

We realise that animals are important companions and we are sensitive to the precarious situation that people living on the street face and must balance this with the safety of all members of public. We provide education to all pet owners about responsible pet ownership and ensure registration and effective control to minimise the incidence of attacks and ensure the safety of pets in the city environment.

Where appropriate, we assist people to access organisations who provide animal welfare support such as low cost or free veterinarian services and emergency boarding.

#### Local Laws and orders

Melbourne City Council's Activities Local Law 2019 (Local Law) requires dog owners to collect and dispose of their dog's waste in public places and always carry means for the effective collection and removal of any dog waste.

Under the Local Law there are prescriptions Council can take to restrict the number of pets in a household. There is currently no restriction on the number of animals a person can keep without a permit.

Melbourne City Council's Order under Section 26(2) of the Act requires dogs to be leashed in public places except for designated off-leash areas.

The following parks currently have designated off-leash areas:

- Clayton Reserve
- Fawkner Park
- JJ Holland Park
- North Melbourne Recreational Reserve
- Princes Park
- Royal Park
- Yarra Park
- Gosch's Paddock
- Stawell St Reserve

The Order also requires dogs to be leashed within 20m of a children's play equipment area or a permanent barbecue or picnic area.

Dogs are prohibited from entering designated spaces within Fawkner Park, JJ Holland Park and Royal Park.

[Further information on dog walking](#)

Note, the City of Melbourne has recently undertaken a review of dogs in open spaces and at the time of writing this report has not yet been endorsed by the Council. Further information and the outcome of this review will be provided appropriate to do so.

## **Resourcing**

The Animal Management Team is coordinated by the Animal Management Coordinator who is supported by a Senior Animal Management Officer, two Animal Management Officers and a team of administration support who process pet registrations. The team delivers services relating to investigations and complaint resolution.

Animal pound services and after hours emergency services are provided by The Lost Dogs Home under contract.

### **Table 1 – Customer Service Request statistics**

The numbers below relate to the number of animal-related requests received from members of the public. Note, in 2019 our customer relationship management system was updated and started including enquiries resolved at first contact among other general enquiries.

<b>Service Type</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
<b>Noise - Barking Dogs</b>	114	123	89	160	152
<b>Collection of Lost/ Injured Cats, Dogs, Livestock</b>	372	451	276	303	298
<b>Dog Attacks &amp; Rushes</b>	62	54	58	113	96
<b>Leashing of Dogs</b>	82	83	94	200	150
<b>Animal Welfare &amp; Cruelty to Animals</b>	18	20	35	29	21
<b>Animal business-inspection/investigation</b>	15	2	6	8	5
<b>Stray Animal (including cat trespassing cats and dogs at large)</b>	90	63	67	108	61
<b>Customer Enquiry/miscellaneous</b>	330	365	1039	1817	1527
<b>Total</b>	<b>1083</b>	<b>1161</b>	<b>1664</b>	<b>2738</b>	<b>2310</b>

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Registration and identification

Dogs and cats are required by State law to be registered annually. They are also required to be microchipped and wear a Council identification marker (a Council supplied registration tag) when outside their premises.

Registration fees partially fund the Animal Management Team enabling proactive park patrols, responsible pet ownership education and investigation of dog attacks and rushes which go a long way to ensuring our public spaces are safe. A levy from pet registration is also provided to the Victorian Government to support their [education programs](#).

In April 2022, the City of Melbourne had 4750 registered dogs and 3740 registered cats.

This figure has dramatically increased in recent years, due to an increase in pet ownership during the COVID-19 pandemic and an amendment to laws relating to pet ownership in rentals. In 2021, we received 1,528 new pet registrations, however approximately 1,000 pets depart from CoM each year due to their owner leaving the municipality, no longer owning the pet or the pet passes away. New pet registrations have increased from 894 in 2019 to 1260 in 2020 – highlighting the clear upward trend of pet registrations.

We are aware that not all pet owners register their pets and that registration rates are higher for dogs compared to cats. Securing initial and annual registrations is an ongoing challenge.

We issue lifetime registration tags so tags are not required to be sent annually and utilise email and text messaging in the registration renewal process which has seen an increase in the number of registrations renewed on time.

There is the view that there are many unregistered pets living in high rise dwellings, however we have undertaken targeted doorknocking to check for unregistered animals which confirmed the majority of pet owners were compliant.

We undertake regular park patrols to identify unregistered animals and find a high level of compliance with registration requirements amongst City of Melbourne pet owners.

#### Table 2 – Registration statistics

*Note, this data was taken at a similar point in time of the year and numbers do vary throughout the year*

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Dogs	3292	3488	3942	4111	4750
Cats	1880	2166	2620	2933	3740
<b>Total</b>	5172	5654	6562	7044	8490

#### What do you think?

- What other measures could the City of Melbourne take to identify any unregistered animals?
- Do you think pet registration is an issue within the City of Melbourne?

## 4.2 Cat confinement

The City of Melbourne does not currently have a cat curfew or a Council order relating to cat confinement. We do not receive a high number of reported complaints about cat nuisance from owned cats. We use existing State laws to manage trespassing and nuisance cat issues.

Trespassing and nuisance complaints relating to owned cats has decreased over the recent period and the Animal Management Team continues to respond to all complaints.

We are aware of a number of unowned (feral) and semi owned cat colonies throughout our municipality which are being managed with the view of reducing the number in each colony.

Cats not being confined to their owner's property can result in a number of issues, including them being lost, injured, creating a nuisance to others and may contribute to the unowned (feral) cat population in addition to wildlife predation.

### What do you think?

- Can you suggest any ideas we should adopt to further improve our management of cats?
- Do you have an issue relating to cat confinement?

## 4.3 Dogs in public places

Dogs are required to be confined to their home property except in the company of their owner (or handler) in public places.

The risks associated with dogs in public places (whether with their owner or wandering at large) include dog attacks on people, other animals and impacts to the enjoyment and safety of other people. There are also welfare concerns for dogs that are wandering at large.

We recognise the physical, social and emotional benefits of dog walking, for both dog and owner which includes the need for public parks where dogs can be exercised off leash. However, there are challenges in the provision of open space generally in a capital city environment and we need to balance the needs of the whole community.

The City of Melbourne has more than 1235 acres of parks, gardens and reserves with nine off-leash areas – totalling 38 acres – and a number of spaces where dogs are prohibited. Dogs are required to be leashed in all remaining public places.

Our challenges around dogs in public spaces include:

- compliance by dog owners with leash requirements and dogs prohibited areas
- effective control of dogs in off leash areas
- ensuring people remove their dog's waste from public places
- Communicating and educating visitors to off leash areas from who live outside the municipality
- managing the substantial growth in our municipality's population and corresponding demands on public open space by all members of the community including dog owners
- Knowledge of off leash areas and signage or designation of these areas

**What do you think?**

- Do you have any suggestions about how Council could further balance the needs of pet owners and non-pet-owners in public places?
- Do you have any suggestions as to what can be done to reduce the number of reports received about people impacted by dogs off leash?

**4.4 Unwanted animals**

The number of dogs impounded within the City of Melbourne in the 2020 – 21 financial year was 154 whilst the number of cats impounded for the same period was 383. These figures have increased in recent years as a result of the management of stray or unowned cats and an increase in the number of animals found outside of the City of Melbourne but delivered to establishments within the City of Melbourne therefore being impounded by us. We are working with neighbouring Councils and establishments to improve the way this is managed.

The Code of Practice for the Management of Cats and Dogs in Shelters and Pounds provides animals may be euthanased if they are;

- infected with an untreatable infectious disease
- unweaned or deformed
- known to have temperament issues including aggressive tendencies.

The euthanasia rate in this period was 3% for dogs (health and temperament issues) and 35% for cats (unowned or feral).

We are aware of several unowned and feral cat colonies in the city that are unwittingly exacerbated by residents who regularly feed these cats making them difficult to contain.

Stray animals are taken to the Lost Dogs Home in North Melbourne. The Lost Dogs Home is our contracted pound provider who provides leading foster care and rehabilitation programs for unwanted animals that has contributed to a decline in euthanasia rates.

Recent legalisation changes by the State Government including pet breeding reforms, reforms to the pet shop industry and upcoming changes further allowing veterinary clinics to reunite animals with their owners aims to address the issues crowded shelters and pounds.

While all Councils are tasked with finding homes for unwanted animals, most rely on the contracted services of the states recognised animal shelters.

**What do you think?**

- What more can the Council do to reduce the number of unowned dogs and cats?

**4.5 Nuisance barking**

Nuisance barking is an ongoing issue in any Council. Barking dog complaints in the City of Melbourne remain constant, however the impact of barking has been reported to be more severe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and people spending more time inside their home.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people work and live, with many people working from home for the majority of 2020 and 2021. Spending more time at home has impacted the way many people experience life in their home and have been more affected by barking dogs than they would have been pre pandemic. This has not only resulted in an increase in the number of reports of nuisance barking, but we have also had to change the way we manage expectations, understanding that nuisance thresholds have changed and the impact to people's lives has changed – this has made it difficult to balance the needs and rights of people in their home and the nature of dogs barking.

The City of Melbourne investigates all barking dog requests and mediates the majority of issues to resolution by providing education and tools for reducing any issue found. Our ongoing education programs promote the exercise and socialisation for dogs including the provision of funded dog training.

#### **What do you think?**

- What other measures could the Council use to address barking dog complaints?
- Have you been impacted by a barking dog and how was your experience?
- Do you own a dog that barks and how is your experience with managing this?

#### **4.6 Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs**

The Act has special requirements for dealing with dogs that have been declared either a dangerous or menacing dog and for dogs that are a restricted breed of dog.

The City of Melbourne has 1 registered declared menacing dog and no registered declared dangerous or restricted breed dogs.

The City of Melbourne will take appropriate action should it deem a dog is required to be declared dangerous, menacing or restricted breed and if a declared dog moves into the City of Melbourne will take prompt action to ensure it is compliant with the requirements.

#### **4.7 Dog attacks**

There has been a trend of an increase in the number of reports received about dogs attacks, with the number of reports increasing from 62 in 2017 - 18 to 96 in 2021 - 22. The City of Melbourne takes dog attacks very seriously and takes prompt and firm action when a report is received. The City of Melbourne is disappointed in the increase in the number of reported dog attacks. Dog attacks sadly impact the lives of people with many victims of dog attacks left with financial expenses and lifelong trauma.

We issue fines to people not complying with leashing requirements or when their dog is involved in minor incidents, while we prosecute serious attacks which includes, where appropriate, seeking orders from a Magistrate for dogs to be destroyed following serious incidents and concerns about public safety.

A review of recent dog attacks has found that alarmingly most reported attacks and rushes occur in public places while the owner of the attacking dog was with or nearby the dog at the time of the attack. This demonstrates that dog attacks may be preventable through appropriate control of dogs or better education.

To increase socialisation of dogs, the City of Melbourne has provided free dog behaviour training events in partnership with The Lost Dogs Home which was delivered to our community in 2019 and 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic additional dog training events were put on hold until there was community surety about gatherings and public events – we aim to continue these from August 2022.

Animal Management Officers proactively patrol public places and provide education and advice on the effective control and confinement of dogs to minimise the risk of attacks.

**What do you think?**

- What other measures could the City of Melbourne use to reduce the number of dog attacks/rushes?
- What else can we do to improve knowledge of and the risks of dog attacks?

#### **4.8 Domestic animal businesses**

The City of Melbourne is responsible for the registration of premises as domestic animal businesses which include:

- pet shops
- animal shelters and pounds
- boarding facilities including day care, overnight and home boarding
- dog training and rearing establishments.

There are four domestic animal businesses in the City of Melbourne that are published on our website including:

- one animal shelter and pound (the Lost Dogs Home)
- one pet shop (Queen Victoria Market Pet Shop)
- two boarding establishments. (the Pets Hotel and Cat Camp)

Domestic animal businesses must apply to register with their Council and must renew their registration every year. The City of Melbourne conducts inspections before approving applications and conducts annual audits to ensure compliance with the relevant Code of Practice.

Nevertheless, every year, requests are made by the community for investigation of domestic animal businesses usually relating to welfare concerns for the animals kept in these establishments. The City of Melbourne issues infringement notices and prosecutes non-compliant businesses where necessary.

The City of Melbourne strives for best practice to ensure the operation of registered domestic animal businesses is above those standards contained in the Code of Practice.

**What do you think?**

- Are there any other initiatives that you believe Council should undertake in relation to Domestic animal businesses?

#### **4.9 Education about responsible pet ownership and other matters.**

The DAMP is required to consider programs, services and strategies that the City of Melbourne intends to pursue to promote and encourage responsible pet ownership of dogs and cats.

Educating the community about responsible pet ownership underpins the provision of the City of Melbourne's animal management service. To be effective, the education activities need to be targeted to specific priorities

and adjusted for the fact that any activities can only be undertaken at the Local Government level and much of the educational material is duplicated from the State Government and replicated across Victoria's 79 Councils.

We provide a range of programs and services, including extensive education material published on our website and reference to the [Victorian Government website](#), desexing vouchers to concession card holders, provision of free dog training events, various collateral for events including responsible pet owner merchandise and dog training vouchers.

We also host an online educational quiz that takes owners through important topics such as confinement and leashing. Participation is rewarded with an alternate metal registration disc that contact phone numbers can be engraved on. An educational video on a code of conduct for dog walkers is available on our website.

Text messaging and emails are used to contact pet owners about registration requirements, upcoming fireworks and the City of Melbourne's social media accounts are frequently used to promote responsible pet ownership including keeping pets safe in storms and hot weather.

Particular communications challenges for the City of Melbourne include:

- the transient nature of the population, as people move in and out of the municipality at higher rates than the metropolitan average, including the return of international students (who might be pet owners) to their home country
- higher than average numbers of people from non-English speaking backgrounds
- the high number of users of the council's off-leash areas who reside outside the municipality
- effective control of dogs in off-leash areas.

However, ongoing improvements in technology, such as social media and SMS messaging, continue to improve the reach and cost of communications.

#### **What do you think?**

- What education priorities do you think the City of Melbourne should focus on?
- Do you have any suggestions on programs or services that the City of Melbourne should consider?

## **5 Next steps**

The City of Melbourne is interested in your views on its animal management service and the development of its Domestic Animal Management Plan.

You may wish to prepare a separate written submission and email to: [animalmanagement@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:animalmanagement@melbourne.vic.gov.au) or post to GPO Box 1603, Melbourne, VIC 3001 or respond to the attached questionnaire.