



WHITEHORSE CITY COUNCIL

Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021–2025



Acknowledgement of country

Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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1. Introduction

Under the provisions of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994 (the Act)* all Victorian councils are required to develop a Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) every 4 years.

The DAMP identifies Councils' responsibilities for education and compliance and provides a framework for Council to manage its statutory responsibilities associated with domestic animal management.

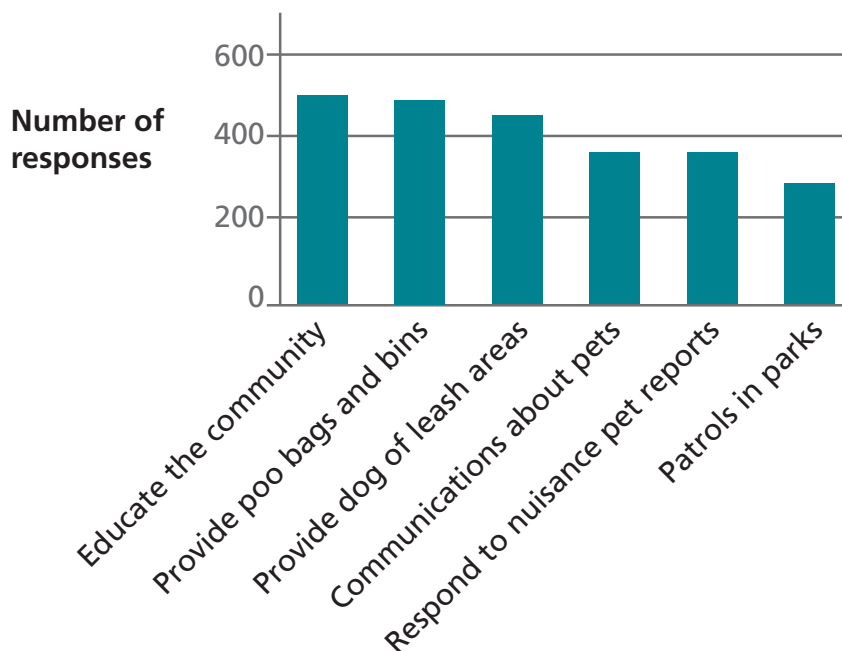
The DAMP has been developed through consultation with the community and key stakeholders and demonstrates the work currently being carried out. It also identifies initiatives to address new or emerging issues that Council plan to implement, address and improve on over the next four years.

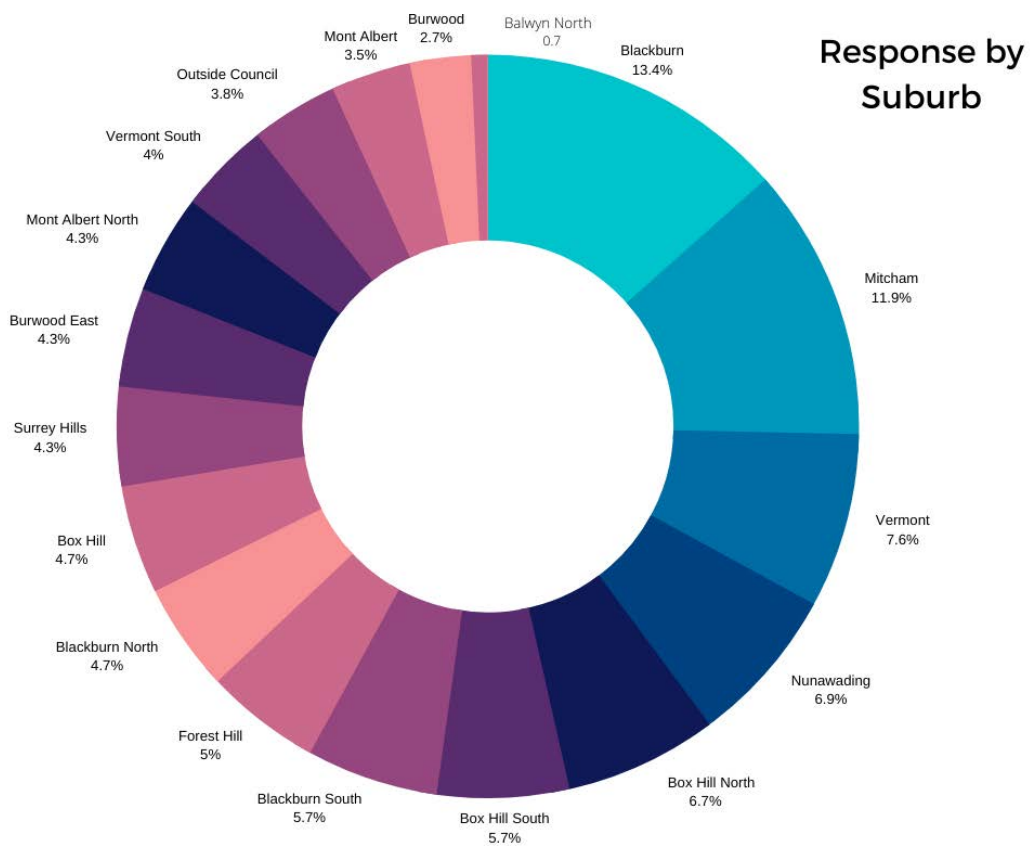
1.1 Community consultation

Whitehorse City Council (Council) undertook three community consultation surveys. The results have been included and indicate the priorities and key issues the community would like to see addressed in the 2021 – 2025 DAMP.

The key issues are as follows:

- Increased enforcement of the legislation, particularly in on lead parks and reserves
- Education of pet and non-pet owners about pets
- Provision of fully fenced off lead areas with regular officer attendance
- Provision of more off lead areas and providing more off lead options e.g. timed off lead
- Provision of poo bags and bins at Council reserves and enforcement of the pick-up rules
- Education, review and enforcement of Cat Curfew
- Nuisance behavior of dogs and owners in shared open space – both Off and On Lead areas



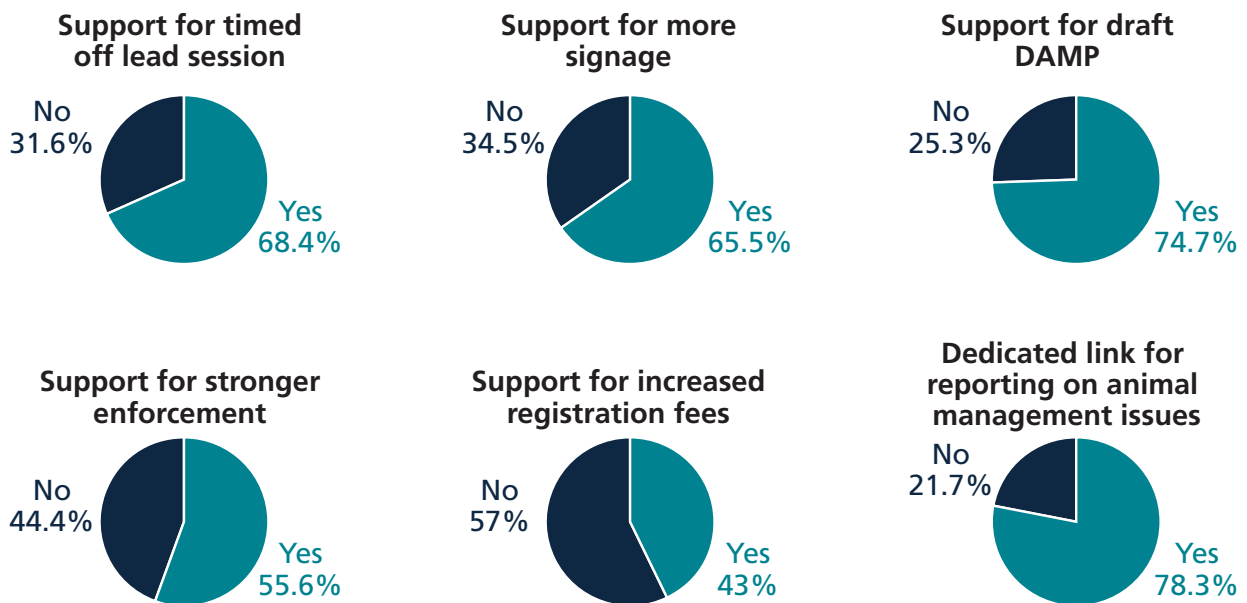


The issues identified from the Community Consultation listed above are addressed in section 3 of this plan and outline Council’s intentions to deliver a range of programs and services to the community. Additionally this plan outlines that consultation with other services and industry experts is required to determine the feasibility of the key issues outlined.



1.2 Draft DAMP consultation

The draft DAMP was released for additional community consultation and engagement with key stakeholder groups with the proposal being well supported by respondents.



Responses and comments were consistent with previous consultations – with support for addressing owner behaviour (effective control, improving compliance with on lead rules and pet waste issues) and increased monitoring, education and enforcement about those issues. Registration compliance was not raised as a high priority, and nuisance from cats was also not seen as a high priority, with the majority of respondents advising they were satisfied with the status quo.

There was strong support to providing a dedicated link on Council’s website for residents to communicate with Council regarding animal management issues, and for increased responsible pet ownership focused signage in public spaces.

1.3 Purpose of the Domestic Animal Management Plan

The purpose of the DAMP is to balance differing community expectations, keep abreast of different trends and improve animal management in the City of Whitehorse. The Plan is aimed at addressing the priority issues identified during community consultation and council’s statutory obligations and supports the development and implementation of a range of strategies that will:

- Encourage responsible pet ownership of cats and dogs through education and enforcement approaches;
- Ensure that officers are adequately trained to fulfil Council’s legislative, educational and enforcement functions;
- Review Council’s animal management services, programs, procedures and policies which include Local Law provisions and existing Orders made under the Act;

- Enhance community safety by reducing the number of dogs not under effective control throughout the municipality;
- Reduce the number of dog attacks;
- Promote the benefits to the community that may be gained by owning companion animals;
- Raise the profile and importance of effective animal management;
- Address the overpopulation of unwanted cats and dogs while minimising euthanasia rates;
- Address domestic animal welfare issues that are specific to the City of Whitehorse community;
- Register and ensure that domestic animal businesses as defined under the Act and declared animals are managed according to the relevant Codes of Practice;
- Continue to return lost and found animals directly to their owners when possible with the impact of reducing pound costs and euthanasia rates, and improving education of owners
- Promote the benefits of desexing dogs and cats;
- Continue to raise awareness of responsible pet ownership in off lead areas;
- To have plans and contingencies in place in the event of an emergency.



1.4 Achievements of the 2017–2020 DAMP

Council has been able to deliver a high quality range of services under the 2017 - 2020 DAMP. The emergence of COVID-19 in 2020 had a significant impact on the way services were delivered and responded to but highlighted the flexible approach taken by officers to continue to deliver services to the community albeit in a modified way.

An increase in park usage was noted during COVID-19 with residents working and studying from home. This led to more use of Council's open space by many residents, both pet and non-pet owners, and the need for increased officer time carrying out park patrols and enforcement in response to concerns received.

The highlights of the 2017–2020 DAMP;

- Reviewed all Orders as required under the Act
- Implemented Animal Handling training for officers
- Changed pound provider delivering a value for money return
- Extensive upgrading of signage (capital works) promoting responsible pet ownership
- Reviewed membership of the Domestic Animal Management Plan Advisory Committee (DAMPAC) expanding community representation
- Promoted responsible pet ownership at the Spring Festival and Whitehorse Business Expo
- Amended operational procedures to focus on reuniting pets with owners where possible
- Regular park patrols including weekends to promote responsible pet ownership
- Review of animal registration renewal process, including data cleansing and verification of data
- First time pet registration now available online
- Barking Dog Education program modified resulting in reduction of need for enforcement
- Officers presented to the 'Domestic Animal Management Planning Best Practise Initiatives Project', run jointly by RSPCA, MAV and AVA - on barking dogs education program and the use of mobile technology by officers
- Agreement with Animal Aid (council's animal pound provider) to provide assistance with animal collections on staff training days and peak periods
- Council is in discussion with the State Government for alternate off-lead park locations during the construction of the North East Link

1.5 City of Whitehorse demographics

The City of Whitehorse is located just 15 kilometres east of Melbourne and covers an area of 64 square kilometres.

The City of Whitehorse is a vibrant municipality, with more than 178,739 residents residing in 65,000 private dwellings. The city is culturally diverse, with 38.4 per cent of residents born overseas and one-third from backgrounds where languages other than English are spoken. In total, more than 120 languages are spoken. The most common languages other than English are Mandarin (12.9 per cent), Cantonese (5.3 per cent), Greek (2.5 per cent), Italian (1.4 per cent) and Vietnamese (1.3 per cent).

Estimated Population Data growth over the next decade:

2021	2026	2031
178,069	185,373	193,589

The City of Whitehorse includes the suburbs of Balwyn North (part), Blackburn, Blackburn North, Blackburn South, Box Hill, Box Hill North, Box Hill South, Burwood (part), Burwood East, Forest Hill, Mitcham, Mont Albert (part), Mont Albert North, Nunawading (part), Surrey Hills (part), Vermont (part) and Vermont South.

1.6 Context

There are ten officers in the Community Laws team that are involved in animal management activities as part of their primary duties. In addition to its day to day service delivery, the team also provides an out of hour's response service 365 days of the year.

Given the diverse roles and activities undertaken by this team, it is critical that all staff involved in animal management have the knowledge, equipment and skills necessary to carry out their work and that they have the necessary legislative authorisations and delegations.

Community expectations are increasing significantly in the animal management area with the table below demonstrating the work load increase during the life of the 2017 -2020 DAMP. Each service request has the potential for numerous additional inspections and ongoing negotiations.

Animal Management related requests

2016/17 FY	2017/2018 FY	2018/2019 FY	2019/2020 FY	2020 /2021 FY
1560	1870	1733	2160	1832

2. Why have a Domestic Animal Management Plan?

2.1 Legislation

Under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (the Act), every Victorian Council is required to prepare a domestic animal management plan. The Act states as follows -

Section 68A Councils to prepare domestic animal management plans

(1) Subject to subsection (1A), each Council must, in consultation with the Secretary, prepare a domestic animal management plan on 4 December 2021 and at the end of each period of 4 years after that day.

(1A) A Council may apply to the Secretary for an extension of time within which to prepare a domestic animal management plan.

(1B) The Secretary may grant an extension of time under subsection (1A) if the Secretary believes that special circumstances exist that warrant the granting of an extension.

(2) A domestic animal management plan prepared by a Council must—

(a) 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; and

(b) 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; and

(c) outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district—

(i) to promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats; and

(ii) to ensure that people comply with this Act, the regulations and any

related legislation; and

(iii) to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals; and

(iv) to address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats; and

(v) to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats; and

(vi) to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance; and

(vii) to 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 this Act and the regulations; and

(d) 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 dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable; and

(e) 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; and

(f) provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

(3) Every Council must—

(a) review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan; and

(b) provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan; and

(c) publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report

3. Our plan

3.1 Training of authorised officers

Section 68(A) (2) (b) of the Act requires Councils to outline their programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of the Act in the Council's municipal district.

Context

Whitehorse has 10 officers in the Community Laws Team that are multi skilled and trained to work across both Animal Management and Local Laws activities as part of their duties. In addition to its weekday service, an out of hour's response service operates for urgent matters.

Given the diverse roles and activities undertaken by this team, it is critical that all staff involved in animal management have the knowledge, equipment and skills necessary to carry out their work and that they have the necessary legislative authorisations and delegations.

Training plan

Whitehorse City Council has a strong commitment to the safety and development of staff and is committed to ensuring all employees possess or attain the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to continue to successfully and safely carry out their roles. Training and skill development requirements are identified through the Whitehorse Performance Appraisal and Development Plan (PADP). To achieve set objectives, training is offered to staff to meet both organisational and individual needs.



Objective 1

All staff to attend animal handling/management training on an ongoing basis as outlined.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Dangerous Dog Management Workshop or similar	Annually	Training completed
Animal Handling	Bi Annually	Training completed

Objective 2

Governance Training – ensures staff are aware of and trained in good governance practices.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Performance Reviews – identify additional training with staff	Annually	Meets standard requirements
Freedom of Information	On induction and as required by Council	Training Completed
Privacy & Data Protection Act	On induction and as required by Council	Training Completed
Manual Handling	On induction and as required by Council	Training Completed
Domestic/Family Violence Awareness Training	As required by Council	Training completed
Customer Service	Annually	Training completed

Objective 3

Identify opportunities to mitigate the Health and Safety risks officers are exposed to.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Occupational Health & Safety: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Difficult conversations • Dealing with aggressive/abusive persons 	Ongoing	Health and Safety issues managed effectively
Situational Awareness	Annually	Training completed
Duress Alarms	On Induction and refresher as required	Monthly testing
Body Worn Cameras	On induction and refresher as required	Monthly testing
Incident Reporting	Immediately after or as soon as possible after an incident	Reporting completed

Objective 4

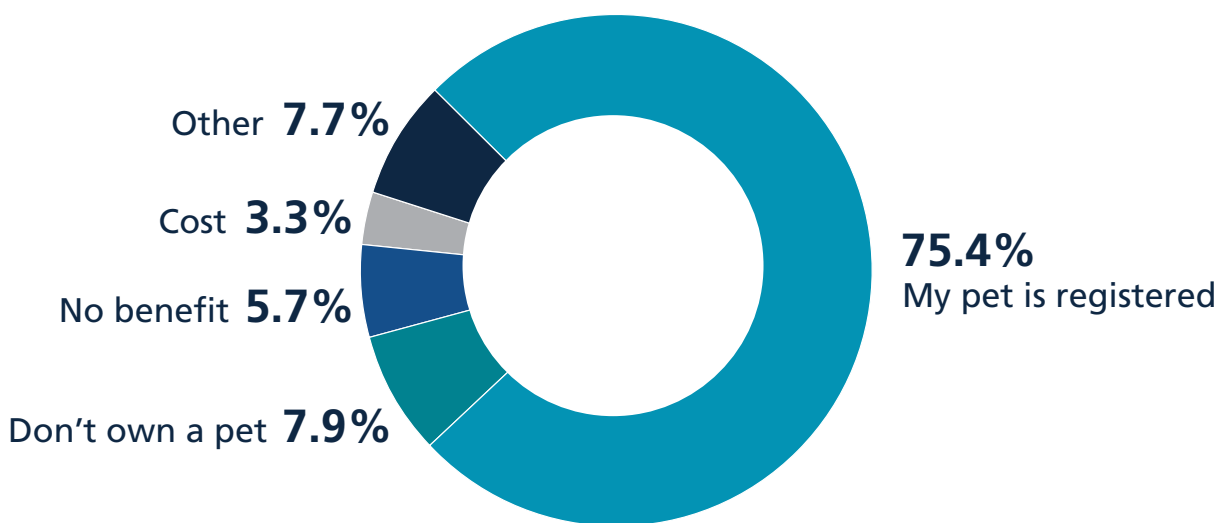
Identify minimum technical skills required for officers to fulfil the requirements of their role.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Refresher Investigation Training	As required	Competence Achieved
Statement and Interview Training	As required	Competence Achieved
Prosecutions Training	As required	Competence Achieved
Legislation Awareness Updates	As required	Competence Achieved

3.2 Registration and identification

This section addresses Sections 68A (2) (a), (c)(i), (c)(ii), (d), (f) and (v) of the Act which requires Council's to outline programs, services and strategies to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats.

Community consultation 2020 and discussion



Whitehorse registration numbers have remained fairly consistent since 2013, despite an increase in the numbers of residents and private dwellings over the same period, reflecting an overall reduction in pet ownership across the municipality. Council also completed a data cleanse of the animal registration data base in 2018 which identified some anomalies such as duplicate records and deceased animals still active on the system. The numbers previously reported for the 2015/16 & 2016/17 periods were incorrect due to these errors being captured.

Whitehorse reviewed and implemented an updated animal registration renewal program prior to the 2020 renewal period to improve on the current process and increase domestic animal registration compliance rates. The updated process included pre

renewal SMS notifications, updated renewal notices with clearer information, reminder SMS notifications of the April 10 due date and provision for information to be emailed to residents.

While COVID-19 allowed for extensions of time in relation to renewal payments an overall increase in compliance was achieved with minimal requirement to carry out property checks for unregistered animals.

Information from impounded and reunited animal records shows that dogs are more likely to be currently registered, reunited and reclaimed than cats.

Whitehorse residents have told us that while animal registration is not an area of high concern, they want to know more about what their registration fees pay for - outlined in Appendix 5. Over 80% (400) of respondents to our survey identified as pet owners.

Feedback from the survey also indicated that residents believe council could consider reduced or free registration for pets adopted from shelters, pounds and for rescue pets with obedience training.

Annual dog and cat registrations

	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Dogs	15,322	12,383	12,763	12,556	12,617
Cats	6,917	5,675	5,883	5,911	5,901
TOTAL	22,239	18,058	18,646	18,467	18,518

	2016 census data			2021 Estimate	2026 Estimate
Population	169,641			185,300	198,791
Dwellings	66,165			72,653	78,588
Population in non-private dwelling	3,253			4,203	4,253
Occupancy	95.26			95.02	94.90

Current situation

Identifying and registering domestic animals is seen as the backbone of a successful animal management program enabling lost and found animals to be reunited with their owners in the shortest possible time. Animal registration also allows Whitehorse to plan services such as park patrols and education programs based on numbers of registered animals and supports officers in investigating domestic animal complaints.

Summary

A focus for the next four years will be on increasing the numbers of registered animals in Whitehorse, particularly in relation to cats, by using a variety of methods such as education around the benefits of animal registration, registration fees and what they cover.

Our policy is to return all registered animals home where possible as a first priority. Where we collect animals wandering in the community our first action will be to try and identify the owner either through registration tags, microchip numbers or other forms of identification. Staff are equipped with scanners that enable the early identification of a lost pet and we will continue to focus on scanning animals to confirm their identity and if the details on the database are correct.

Registration of a pet is the best way of ensuring a lost pet is returned to its owner in the shortest amount of time reducing stress levels on both the owner and pet.

To increase animal registrations across the City of Whitehorse the following activities will be administered.

Objective 1

Increase the number of animal registrations through delivery of clear key messaging around the benefits of animal registration and what the fee covers.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Offering free first time juvenile registration	Ongoing	Number of registrations
Investigate and evaluate options for free first time registration for adopted animals	2022/23	Cost analysis
Registration pack sent to owners and made available at Vet clinics and other associated animal service providers– includes educational material on responsible pet ownership / registration information	Ongoing	Number of owners registering
Use SMS messaging to inform residents of renewals	Annually	Reduction in unregistered animals
Send animal registration renewal/reminder notices	Annually	Reduction in unregistered animals
Microchip data base cleansing	2022	All microchips are 15 digits in length
Ensure all unregistered pets at large are registered prior to being returned to owner	Ongoing	Increase in number of registered pets

Objective 2

Provide multi lingual education and promotion on the benefits of animal registration.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Educate / Promote benefits of registration	Ongoing	Increase in registration numbers
Educate/promote - subsidised desexing program to residents in receipt of a pension	Ongoing	Number of vouchers redeemed
Develop CALD program to promote/ educate on the benefits of animal registration	2022-2023	Increase in animal registrations from CALD community
Develop program to increase registration in multi-unit residential housing	2023-2024	Increase in uptake of registration at multi-unit residential housing
Reunification of registered pets to owners	Ongoing	Number of pets reunited
Use of email addresses to provide improved real time messaging	Ongoing	10% take up of option

3.3 Nuisance animals

This section addresses section 68A(2) (a),(c)(i),(c)(ii),(d),(f) and (vi) of the Act outlining programs, services and strategies to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance

Current situation

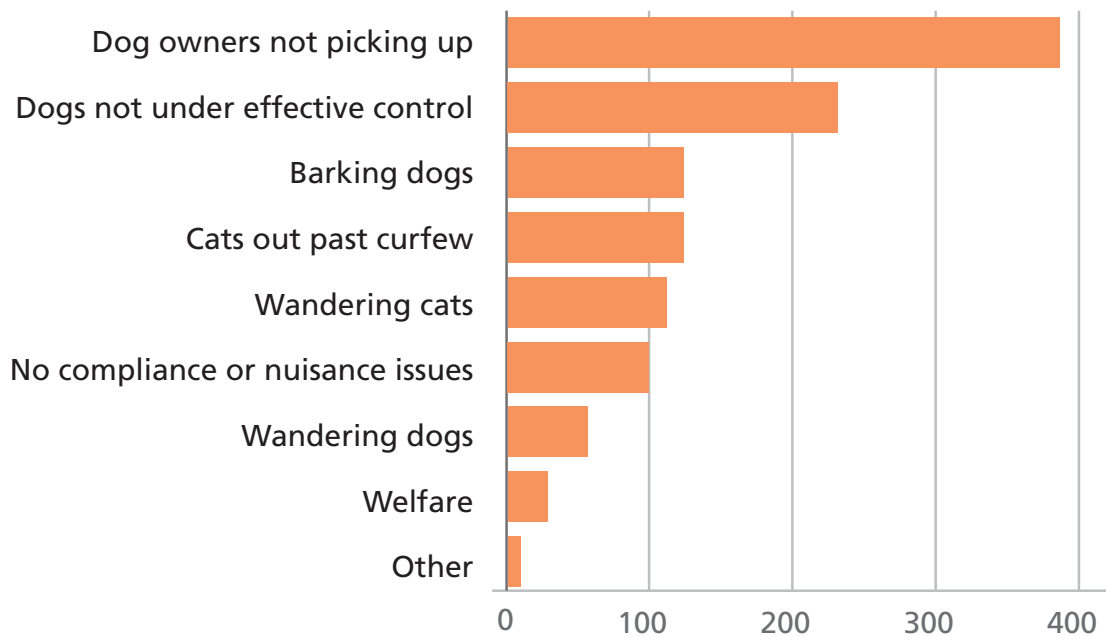
Council recognises that the majority of pet owners understand the need to manage their pets in a responsible and considerate way. Ongoing education is required where there are pet owners who may be unaware of their obligations in relation to the requirements of responsible pet ownership.

Over the life of the previous DAMP, the numbers of requests received by Council relating to animal nuisance have been reducing, as shown in the table below.

Service Type	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Dog at Large - contained	476	383	356	259
Cat at Large	301	307	322	337
Dog Barking	372	327	280	264

Service Type	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Dog at Large – not contained	221	206	202	160
Dog Litter	27	27	17	29
Nuisance Animal	9	27	26	63
Grand Total	1406	1277	1203	1112

The main nuisance issues identified by residents from the consultation in 2020 relating to domestic animals are outlined below –



Dog litter

One of the key issues to come out of our consultation survey was that dog owners are not collecting their dogs waste nor disposing of it responsibly.

Recent responses to the community consultation survey indicated that a high priority for residents was related to owners not picking up dog litter (over 80% of respondents) and a request for council to enforce this requirement. There was strong feedback that Council should supply dog litter bags and bins in all parks to assist with achieving compliance and reducing the incidence of uncollected dog litter.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in complaints regarding dog litter on footpaths and on shared sports ovals where owners had not been paying attention to their dogs' behaviours. A challenge for officers obtaining compliance is having witnesses willing to provide a statement.

Council's Community Local Law 2014 requires a person who is in control of a dog to remove any faeces deposited by their dog responsibly and to carry a poo bag when in public.



Section 5.5 Animal litter;

"Whenever an animal is outside the land at which it is normally kept, the person in control of the animal must:

- (a) not allow any faeces from the animal to remain on a road, municipal place or land owned or occupied by another person;*
- (b) carry a litter device and must use it for the purposes of removing any faeces of the animal; and*
- (c) dispose of any faeces of the animal in a manner which does not cause any nuisance or health hazard to any person or detriment to the environment."*

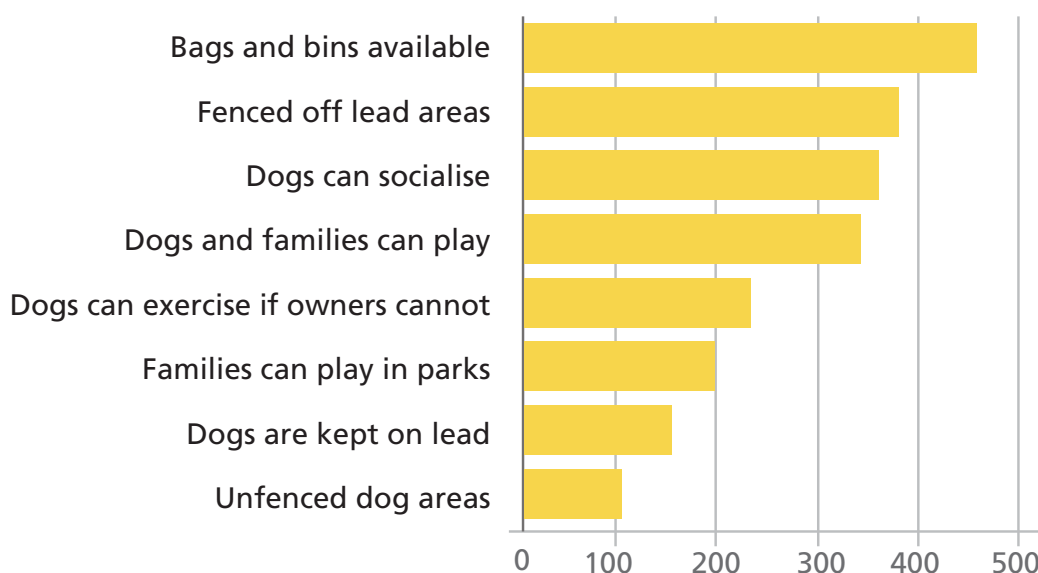
Despite the provisions of the Local Law and the concentrated efforts of officers implementing:

- targeted and random patrols of parklands and sporting grounds
- handing out of waste bags
- letterbox drops, posters
- temporary signage and media articles and
- educating the community and encouraging responsible behaviour of dog owners;

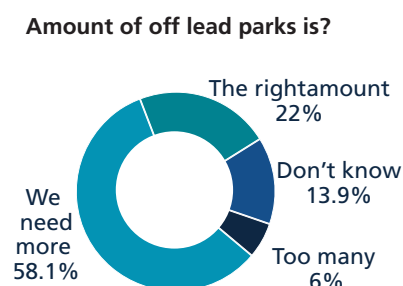
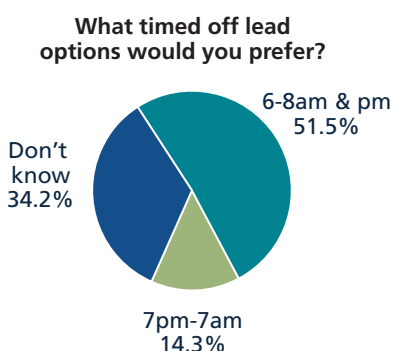
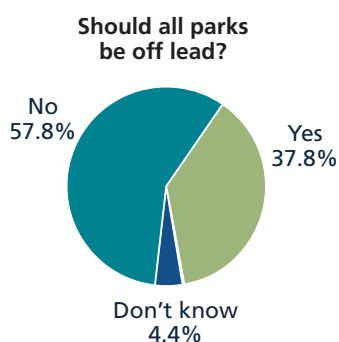
it is evident that a new approach is required to gain compliance.

Dogs not under effective control

Consultation 2020 results below indicated residents' concerns about shared open space.

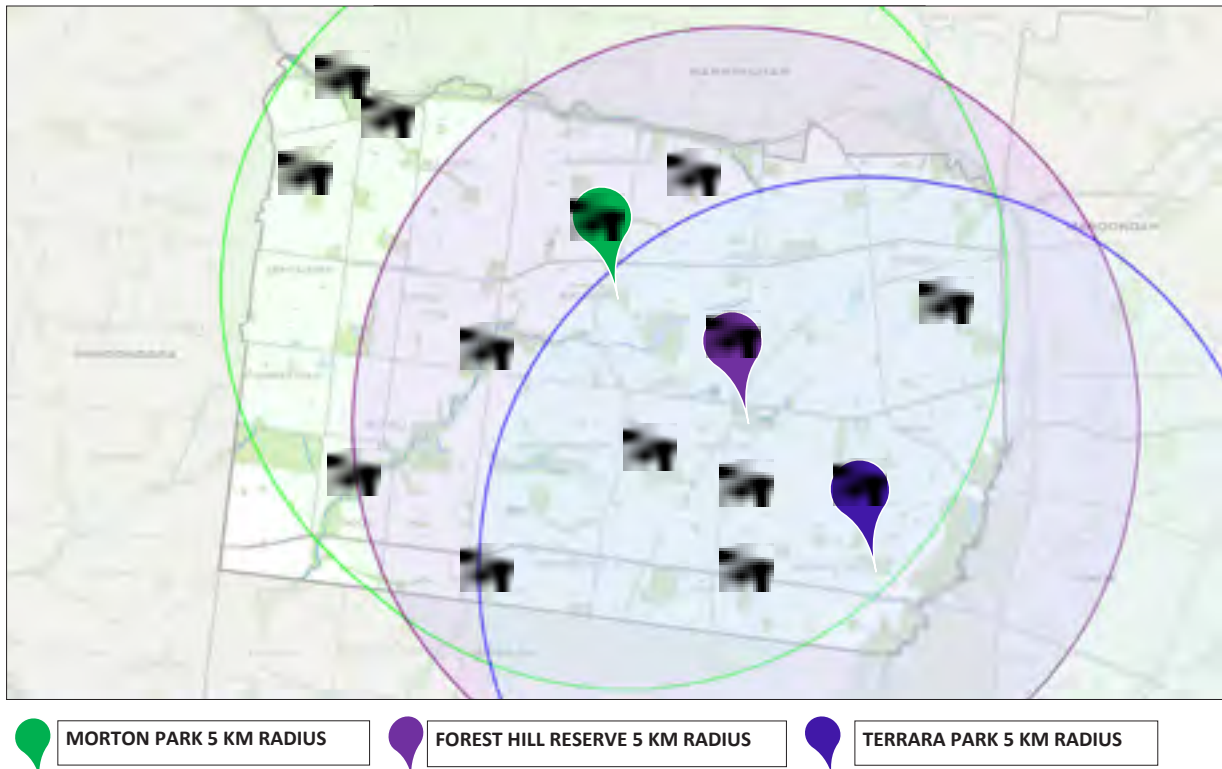


There are more than 330 parks and 20 bushland reserves in the City of Whitehorse of which 22 have provision for dogs to be exercised off lead. One of the challenges for the community is recognising that there is limited open space across the municipality and the resource is one that must be shared by all park users including pet owners, sports clubs and residents.



In light of community feedback received during consultation Council is open to exploring alternate off lead options including timed off lead areas in shared parks. The provision of shared open space between sporting groups and designated dog off lead areas will be reviewed to ensure equitable access by all groups. This may result in off lead areas being limited to parts of the reserve rather than the entire reserve.

The vast majority of residents in Whitehorse have to travel less than five kilometres from their home to access a dog off lead park.



Regular park users reported many new dogs and owners out in parks seemingly unaware of effective control rules, with reports of poor dog and owner behaviour and dogs not used to interacting with groups of dogs. Towards the end of 2020, reports of incidents in the parks have begun to reduce again.



Dog behaviour and dogs not being under effective control in public spaces was a concern for over 40% of survey respondents. Residents particularly wanted -

- training and education for owners and dogs where dogs have shown aggression
- muzzles to be required for aggressive dogs in public
- increased enforcement and education about dog on lead requirements in general and in the dog on lead parks due to perceived high non-compliance with leash rules
- More officer presence at off lead parks providing education, enforcing effective control requirements and encourage better behaviour
- Increased education for both dog and non-dog owners about dog behaviour.

Barking dogs

During the life of the current DAMP an educational process for barking dog complaints was implemented which involved contacting the dog owner before requiring a barking nuisance log, discussing the issue and encouraging the dog owner to undertake self-managed monitoring and recording of their dog in order to establish the extent of the issue if any.

The complainant is also educated at the time about Council's process, the level of evidence that may be needed and provided with a log form to use should the issue continue after Council's initial communication with the dog owner.

The data on barking dog complaints over the past 4 years has shown a reduction in initial complaints and a significant reduction in the volume of noise logs received from residents indicating an increase in matters resolving at the initial stage. This reduction can be attributed to education provided through information on line, improvements with comprehensive information about noise nuisance issues, through support provided by Council's education officer and changes to Council's barking dog process.

Barking Dog Matters	2015/16	2019/20	2020/21
Nuisance Complaints	405	280	264
Nuisance Logs received	50	11	15

Cats

Whitehorse residents have not previously reported cat trespassing as a major issue, however more recently there has been an increase in cats causing nuisance on other people's property. Residents may be aware of the overnight curfew in Whitehorse, but may not be aware that in Victoria (under the Act) cats are not allowed to persistently wander onto other people's property without permission.

Residents can obtain cat traps from council in a controlled manner that enables discussions with owners of cats that are causing problems. The effectiveness of this strategy is supported by the continued reduction in cat trap use as detailed in the table below:

Cat Cages Borrowed	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total	62	59	55	39

Cat at Large	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total	301	307	322	337

The purchase of a pole scanner in early 2020 has provided benefits to officers and cats. Council officers are better positioned to reunite registered cats by safely verifying ownership at the time of collection rather than the need to impound them to be able to ascertain ownership.



Council will continue to work with our partners in relation to microchipping and desexing programs to support responsible cat ownership and an education program will be aimed at cat owners on the value of cats being contained to their properties.

Council orders

To assist Council and the community in responsible pet ownership, a number of strategies have been implemented. These strategies include a number of Orders (Appendix 1) made under section 26 (2) of the Act and Local Law provisions made in accordance with section 111 of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Council's Orders and Community Local Law 2014 will be reviewed during the life of the DAMP including section 5 of the Local Law which relates to the keeping of domestic animals.

Summary

The community consultation survey has indicated that the key nuisance areas to focus on over the next four years are:

- dog litter
- dogs not under effective control
- wandering cats
- barking dogs

Residents that responded to the survey strongly indicated they want Council to educate and enforce on:

- Dog litter
- Dog on leash provisions in dog on lead parks
- Effective control of dogs when off lead and
- To provide more fully fenced dog off lead areas that are not shared ovals

The objectives outlined below will assist to address the concerns raised.

Objective 1

Reduce dog barking complaints

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and update if relevant current Dog Barking procedure	2021	Review finalised and amendments implemented
Educate dog owners and complainants around barking dog management strategies	Ongoing	Number of complaints progressing to enforcement



Objective 2

Reduce cat nuisance complaints

Activity	When	Evaluation
Education for owners/community on wandering cats	Ongoing	Number of complaints progressing to enforcement
Cat Curfew – trapping of nuisance cats	Ongoing	Number of traps used and number of cats impounded
Review Cat trap hire process	2022	Cat trap process updated
Review Council Order # 8 Compulsory cat desexing	2022 -2024	Results of consultation, order varied if required.
Review Council Order # 9 Cat Curfew, including consideration of a 24 hour cat containment order	2022-2024	Results of consultation, order varied if required.
Review Council Order # 10 Designated cat prohibited bushland reserves	2022-2024	Results of consultation, order varied if required.

Objective 3 Responsible Pet Ownership in Public Open Space

Develop strategies to improve responsible pet ownership in public open spaces including through community consultation, reviewing Council orders and education

Activity	When	Evaluation
Education and enforcement of picking up dog waste. Use of Council website and media	Ongoing	Number of website hits
Education and enforcement in on/off lead parks – Pop up education sessions	Ongoing	Number of park patrols /pop ups completed
Enforcement of effective control of dogs in public places and shared use spaces	Ongoing	5% Reduction in complaints
Installation of educational signs and use of embedded QR code	2021-22	Reduction in complaints. Feedback from officers
Provide education on responsible pet ownership in registration packs	Annually	Volume sent

Activity	When	Evaluation
Investigate strategy to deliver free recall training for resident dog owners	Monthly	Training opportunities in place
Review existing dog off lead areas including investigating options for timed off lead trials in existing on lead parks	2022-23	Consultation and cost analysis complete
Review existing dog off lead areas including investigating options for timed off lead trials in existing on lead parks	2022-23	Consultation and cost analysis complete
Investigate provision and cost of litter bags, bins, bin collections	2022-23	Benchmarking, cost analysis and consultation complete
Review existing Orders made under the Act and the Local law provisions as they relate to domestic animals	2023 -24	Animal Orders and Local Law provisions updated

3.4 Dog attacks

This section addresses Section 68A(2)(a), (c)(i), (c)(ii), (d), (f) of the Act outlining programs, services and strategies to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals

Current situation

Whitehorse is committed to reducing the number, impact and injuries associated with dog attacks in our community. Council’s Community Laws Officers investigate incidents of dog attacks and other aggressive dog behaviour as quickly and efficiently as possible. The intent is to utilise the “tools” provided within the Act to address and remove ongoing risks to the community.

We do this by utilising a range of proactive messaging and education, firm but fair investigation and when required, enforcement action against offending dog owners.

It is a high priority for all Community Laws Officers to have the required skills, knowledge and equipment to effectively carry out the tasks associated with the investigation of dog incidents, as well as the safe handling and transportation of all dogs including aggressive dogs.

The following table details the number of dog attack investigation conducted over the past four years. It should be noted that some dog attacks reported are of a minor nature with no injuries reported.

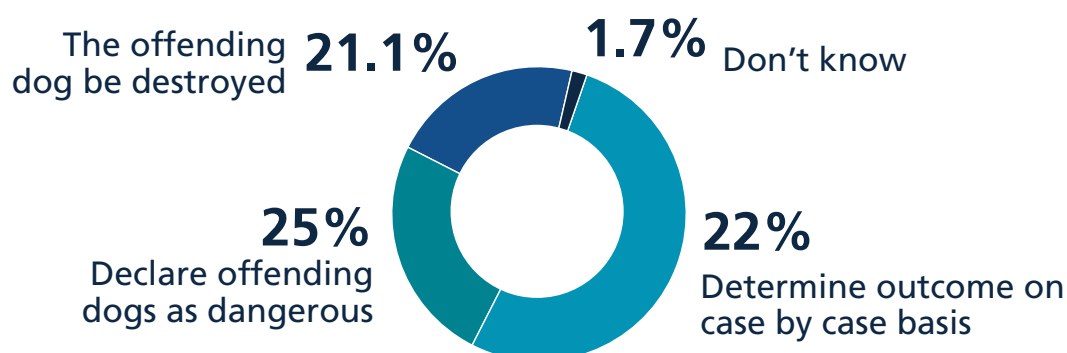
Dog attack data

Dog attack	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Major attack	13	12	12	13
Minor attack	11	14	28	33
Incident	49	37	48	54
Total	73	63	88	100

While reports of dog attacks had been reducing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase of reports of minor dog attack incidents was noted during lockdown periods with an increase of residents out walking their dogs in parks and reserves. While there was frequently no injuries sustained, the community have reported that dogs were interacting roughly or aggressively and not under effective control by their owners.

In regards to the outcome for serious dog attacks, 52% of respondents felt that each incident should be dealt with by Council on a case by case basis, 25% thought that the dog should be declared dangerous and 21% felt that the offending dog should be destroyed.

Outcome after serious dog attack



Owners of dogs that have attacked and caused serious injury as defined under the Act are generally prosecuted.

However the Act provides Councils with a number of enforcement options as they relate to dog attacks. These include declaring the dog either dangerous or menacing (depending on the severity of the attack) and issuing infringements.

The following table provides information on court action as a result of alleged dog attacks:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Prosecutions	7	11	5	8

Further information is available on the Know Your Council Website at: <https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/councils/whitehorse>

Summary

Council's animal management strategy is designed to provide a safe environment for dog owners and non-dog owners alike.

Dogs that have a propensity to attack are managed through education, investigation and enforcement as necessary.

Dogs that do attack are managed through the provisions of the Act that may see the dog's owner prosecuted and their dog declared as dangerous or menacing placing significant additional controls on how these dogs are kept.

Council actively investigate all dog attacks assessing the incident against the Act which will provide a framework for officers guiding them to what action is required.

Dogs that have caused serious injury may be seized and held at Council's Animal Pound until the Court Hearing. This action provides an additional layer of protection for the community.

Objective 1

Reduce the number of dog attacks in the community through education and compliance

Activity	When	Evaluation
Education regarding dog behaviour and what Council has authority to enforce	Ongoing	Reduction in complaints
Education for dog owners on what effective control means	Ongoing	Evaluation of complaint types
Focus park patrols on high risk locations	Ongoing	Reduction in complaints and incidents at known locations

Objective 2

Improved awareness and compliance with On Leash and Off Leash provisions

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review current park signage and identify opportunities for improvements	2021-2023	Review completed
Review educational material and promote widely	2022-2024	New resources available
Targeted Park Patrols to address non compliance	Ongoing	Data evaluation and programmed patrols

3.5 Dangerous, menacing & restricted breed dogs

This Section (68A(2) (a) (ci, ii, vii) (d) and (f) of the Act outlines programs, services and strategies that Council utilise to effectively identify all dangerous and menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and regulations

Management of known Restricted Breed, Declared Dangerous and Menacing dogs within Whitehorse is a high priority. In line with the requirements of the Act Council officers monitor the housing and management of declared dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs.

Restricted breed dogs

Legislation indicates that restricted breed dogs pose a potential risk to the community and other dogs. Restricted breed dogs have controls placed on them due to the increased potential of/and aggressive nature of the breed in general.

A restricted breed dog is any one of the following breeds:

- (a) Japanese Tosa;
- (b) Fila Brasileiro;
- (c) Dogo Argentino;
- (d) Perro de Presa Canario (or Presa Canario); and
- (e) American Pit Bull Terrier (or Pit Bull Terrier).

Menacing or dangerous dog

If a dog exhibits certain behaviours and/or there is an incident that the Act defines as a dog attack or rush, then Council has the power to declare that dog either a menacing dog or a dangerous dog. To declare a dog either a dangerous or menacing dog, the Act has established criteria for each type of declaration that must be met.

Menacing Dog: A menacing dog is one that council has declared to be menacing because it has caused a non-serious bite injury to a person or animal, or if it has rushed at or chased a person. The act prescribes the definition of a non-serious injury.

Dangerous Dog: A dangerous dog is one that the council has declared to be dangerous because it has bitten or attacked a person or animal, causing serious injury or death; or if the dog is a menacing dog and its owner has received at least 2 infringement notices for failing to comply with restraint requirements. The Act prescribes the definition of a serious injury.

Dangerous and Menacing dog declarations are generally used in conjunction with prosecution to ensure measures are put in place that assists with the management of a potential future risk to our community.

Current situation

In the financial year 20/21 Council declared 1 dog as dangerous with the matter subsequently overturned by VCAT on appeal with VCAT imposing strict conditions and 2 dogs were declared menacing.

Where non-compliance of restricted breed or declared dog provisions are identified, enforcement action is initiated as specified in the Act.

The following table details the number of declarations made by Council over the past four years.

Type of declaration	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Restricted breed dog	0	0	0	0
Declared dangerous dog	0	0	2	0
Declared menacing dog	0	2	0	2

As previously outlined, in serious dog attacks, 52% of the respondents believe that Council should deal with these matters on a case by case basis, 25% of respondents thought the dog should be declared dangerous and 20% thought the offending dog should be destroyed.

The introduction of a 'Dog Attack Assessment Criteria' in 2020 provides officers with a tool to guide the decision making process when investigating dog attack incidents. The criteria has been applied to a number of dog attack matters. In a recent VCAT hearing, the presiding member commented on the effectiveness, strength and objectivity of the criteria.

Objective 1

Monitoring of Declared Dogs

Activity	When	Evaluation
Annual inspection of declared dogs	Annually	All inspections completed
Prosecution of non-compliance of declared dogs	As required	Prosecutions undertaken if required

3.6 Overpopulation and high euthanasia

This section relates to Section 68A (2)(a) (ci, ii and iv) of the Act outlining programs, services and strategies that Whitehorse carry out to address over overpopulation and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats

Current situation

Council makes every effort to reunite pets with their owners as quickly as possible.

The following table demonstrates the improved reunification levels for both cats and dogs and the upward trend of cats and dogs being returned home rather than being placed in the pound.

Dog collections	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Returned to owner by Council	105	110	116
Reunited by phone (council contacts pet owner by phone and advises of need to collect)	85	72	40
Owner located prior to Council attendance	21	32	56
Impounded at Animal Aid	135	108	51
Total	346	322	263

Current registration and up to date contact details on microchip records makes this much easier and contributes to a reduction in the numbers of pets that are required to be impounded at Whitehorse's nominated animal pound. Animal Aid in Coldstream have been Council's pound provider since 2017.

In addition, Council has a section 84Y agreement in place with the RSPCA. The 84Y agreement authorises the RSPCA to hold lost and stray animals for up to 2 days for the purpose of reuniting them with their owners. If the RSPCA are not able to reunite the lost or stray pets, the animals are collected by Council and cared for at Animal Aid while further efforts in locating their owners are made.

The following data has been provided by Animal Aid. It provides details of Council and community impounded and surrendered animals, animals returned home and euthanasia rates.

Animal Aid	Type	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Dogs	Total dogs impounded at Animal Aid	148	135	108	51
	Adopted	21	26	14	7
	Euthanised	13	9	8	6
	Foster/Welfare/Other	1	1	6	2
	Reclaimed	113	99	80	36
Cats	Total cats impounded at Animal Aid	247	259	222	208
	Adopted	155	160	135	134
	Euthanised	69	71	63	55
	Foster/Welfare/Other	10	9	8	7
	Reclaimed	13	19	16	12

The data indicates that in the City of Whitehorse over the past 4 years there has been a reduction in animals collected, and an increase in animals returned to their owners with significantly lower euthanasia rates.

In 2020/2021 there has been a marked reduction in the number of reports relating to dogs at large and dogs impounded and an increase in dogs located by their owners. Council believes that this can be attributed in large to the COVID-19 restrictions over this period with an increase in owners at home during the day, less dogs getting out and owners able to commence searching for pets straight away.

Feedback from residents has indicated that they would like;

- more information about lost and found pets
- education about adoption of pets from shelters and pounds
- information and education about pet selection and benefits
- education focussed on improving responsible pet ownership and reducing the numbers of animals being surrendered
- to do more about unowned and stray cats
- education about not feeding stray cats and engaging with the council to address the issues of unowned cats

Education of all residents about pets was seen as a high priority, including pet and non-pet owners. Residents also indicated that they would like to receive more information around training and welfare.

Annually Council provides responsible pet ownership information in the pet registration renewal pack, conduct information sessions at various parks across Whitehorse, attend the Spring Festival annually providing information and have articles produced in various mediums including social media, on line and printed options.

Objective 1

Activity	When	Evaluation
Promotion of keeping contact details updated	Ongoing	Improvement of reuniting animals with owners
Microchip data cleanse reconciliation	2022-2025	Improvement of reuniting animals with owners

3.7 Domestic animal businesses

This section refers to Section 68A(2a), (c)(i), (c)(ii), (d) and (f) of the Act outlining programs, services and strategies which Whitehorse intends to pursue in its municipal district to ensure that people comply with this Act, the regulations and any related legislation”

All Domestic Animal Businesses (DAB) must be registered with Council. Once an application is received, the Business is audited and inspected in accordance with the relevant Code of Practice and if compliant, a certificate of registration is issued. Registrations are renewed annually and the businesses are inspected throughout each year.

If a business is found to be non-compliant with the Code of Practice, then staff will work with the business owner to undertake strategies to rectify the identified issues.

Our current activities include;

- registration of all DABs
- Annual inspection and audit of all DABs
- Support service to address any issues DABs may face in relation to the Legislation
- Investigations of complaints lodged in regards to the operation of a DAB

During the life of the existing DAMP there have been many changes to the Act as they relate to DABs, some of these changes include:

- the introduction of the Puppy Farm Amendment Bill
- recognition of community foster care networks and a registration process for voluntary foster carers and animals in their care
- reduced registration fees for foster animals with registered foster carers

- restriction on the sale of dogs and cats from pet shops unless from approved sources
- the creation and implementation of the Pet Exchange Register and the requirement for source numbers for all people advertising pets for sale/rehoming
- animals for sale must include both the microchip and source number in any advertisement which the public can check on line
- dogs and cats cannot be microchipped unless the owner or breeder supplies a source number

Summary

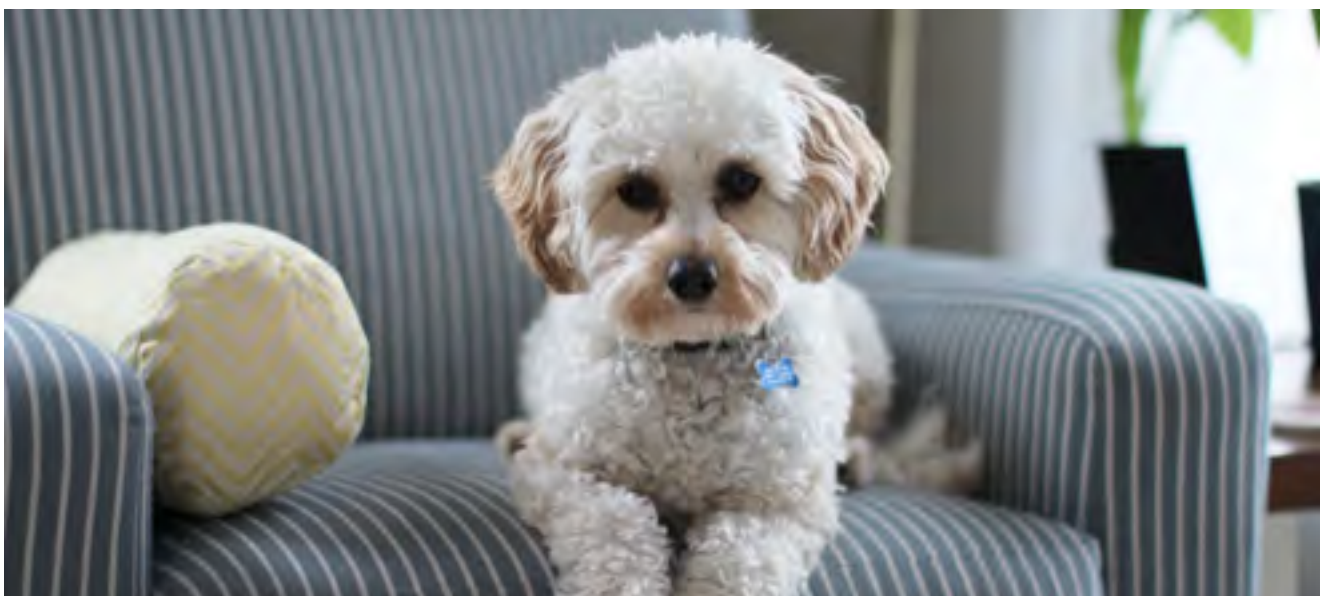
The number of DABs in Whitehorse is not high and with the changes to the pet shop rules, the majority of our registered pet shops no longer sell cats and dogs. Council has not needed to issue any breach notices since the Pet shop amendments began.

Pet shops and other types of DABs were not raised as matters of concern by those residents responding to our survey apart from expressing concern about general pet welfare, training and education regarding appropriate pet selection. The operation of DABs was not mentioned. There was some noting of the need to educate residents to adopt not shop, but that was the extent of the concern.

Objective 1

Ensure all Domestic Animal Businesses in Whitehorse are registered, inspected annually and comply with the Code of Practice

Activity	When	Evaluation
Identify and register all DAB in Whitehorse	Annually	Ensure all DAB registrations are renewed annually
Audit all DAB for compliance with legislation	Annually	All DABs audited and any compliance issues addressed
Investigate complaints relating to DAB operations	As required	Ensure compliance is maintained.



4. Other Matters

4.1 Pound service

Recent data sourced from Council's customer service request system and from animal impound data identifies that the majority of pets found wandering or lost are registered and subsequently returned to their owners.

This can be attributed to the following:

- Legislative change in 2007 to make microchipping compulsory is paying dividends as the general animal population is mainly microchipped at sale – hence ownership is more easily determined and again animals can be sent home rather than impounded. Registration can be addressed at reclaim if needed;
- Introduction in 2010 of a Cat Curfew in Whitehorse and the associated community awareness/education programs carried out. Residents are generally aware of their responsibilities and raise matters for Council's attention as required;
- Better access for Officers to animal registration information outside of normal working hours that enables ownership details to be obtained and the animal reunited with its owner eliminating the need to take the animal to the pound;
- Improved coordination between various microchip data enabling more animals to be reunited with their owners rather than the animal being impounded; and
- A greater emphasis internally to explore all avenues that can reunite the animal with the owner provided ownership details are correct with either Council and/ or the microchip company
- Officers operate a mobile office with access to all information related to pet ownership 24 hours a day

4.2 DAMPAC

Whitehorse City Council has established a Domestic Animal Management Plan Advisory Committee (DAMPAC) which together with the DAMP provides a framework for Council to manage its statutory responsibilities associated with domestic animal management. These frameworks recognise that animal management is an ever evolving environment requiring ongoing assessment and development to address emerging issues.

The Terms of Reference for DAMPAC requires a minimum of one meeting per annum to discuss DAMP activities, consider Council service provision in animal management, make recommendations to Council on related issues and identify opportunities for improvement. Generally DAMPAC meets three times a year.

DAMPAC's Terms of Reference are detailed in Appendix 4

5. Appendix

5.1 Appendix 1 — Our orders, local laws, council policies and procedures

Council Orders

In accordance with the Act and the Local Government Act 1989, Council has established a series of local requirements that supports and promotes responsible pet ownership. These local standards include Orders made under the Act and Local Law provisions made in accordance with Local Government Act 1989.

Council Orders are available on Councils Website to be viewed in full.

Council Order No. 7 made under Section 26(2) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994

Includes -

- The owner of a dog must keep that dog under effective control while the dog is in a public place, including dog off lead areas
- Effective control has now been defined
- In a public place dogs are not permitted within 2.5 metres of the perimeter of; any sports ground/field or similar during organised sporting events, children's play space, bbq or picnic area and principal location of an organised meeting
- Lists parks where dogs can be exercised off lead

Council Order No. 8 made under Section 10A (1) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994

Compulsory Cat Desexing

- Whitehorse City Council will not after April 9 2020 register a cat for the first time, unless the cat is desexed or is exempted under Section 10B (1) Domestic Animals Act 1994.

Council Order No. 9 made under Section 25 (2) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994

Cat Confinement

- The owner of any cat/s must keep the cat/s confined at night, between the hours of 8.00pm and 6.00am

Council Order No. 10 made under Section 26 (2) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994

Designated Cat Prohibited Bushland Reserves

- The owner of a cat must keep their cat from designated Council bushland reserves

Local Laws

Part 5 of the Whitehorse City Council Community Local Law 2014 (the Local Law) relates to the keeping of animals including;

- Numbers of animals that can be kept
- Housing of animals
- Specified Wetland Guide (an incorporated document of the Local Law) - lists those Wetlands that dogs are not allowed to enter.

The Local Law is available on Council's website, section 5 of the Local Law – Keeping of Animals will be reviewed during the life of the DAMP.

To assist Community Laws Officers to provide consistent service delivery, operation manuals have been developed that provide an overview of the expectations, expected standards and guidelines in the management of service requests.

The operational manuals are supported by a Department Business Plan where the values and principles have been identified and agreed to.

At Whitehorse our service delivery is about managing the grey and providing opportunities for our community to be responsible pet owners.

Policies and procedures

The following policies and procedures together with the Act guide the work of officers in carrying out their duties;

- Permitted animals and birds kept on land
- Keeping of bees
- Conditions under which animals and birds are kept
- Noise and Odour
- Animal Litter
- Wandering animals and birds
- Prohibited places for farm animals and dogs
- Cats found at Large
- Dogs found at Large
- Offences and Liability relating to dog attacks
- Aggressive, Menacing and Dangerous Dog Matrix
- Panel for declaration
- Restricted Breed Dogs
- Power to seize and dispose of cats or dogs
- Injured Dogs or Cats
- Destruction of Dogs
- Registration and Conduct of Domestic Animal Businesses
- Seizure of Documents
- Dogs or Cats creating a nuisance
- Wildlife and Vermin
- Off-Lead Dog Park Patrols

5.2 Appendix 2 — Education and promotional activities

Council undertakes a number of proactive activities that reduce the need for enforcement, provide education on responsible pet ownership, establishes community partnerships and provides for a safe environment able to be shared by as many people and their pets as possible.

These programs include:

Pop up displays at public open spaces where dogs are exercised. Staff at these displays provide information on;

- where you can exercise your dog – on lead/off lead
- information on the Local Law
- offer pet safety tips
- discuss responsible pet ownership and registration/microchip data
- giveaways such as dog waste bags and dog leashes

Other promotional and education activities include;

- Spring Festival – Council’s annual Spring Festival is an opportunity to provide information and education on the suite of services offered to the community around responsible pet ownership
- Brochures displayed at all municipal offices for easy community access
- Responsible Pet Ownership brochures sent with all animal registration and renewal packs
- Information available on Council website
- Education on reuniting lost cats and dogs when collected by a Community Laws Officer if wearing its registration tags or able to be identified,
- First time juvenile registration discounts;
- Subsidised cat release and registration fees;
- Animal advice service on suitability of pets and their owner’s lifestyle;
- Barking dog management plans;
- Cat Trap Hire Program
- RSPCA and Animal Aid partnerships in community events;
- Education for CALD communities;
- Presentations at community meetings

5.3 Appendix 3 — Compliance activities

There are a number of programs carried out by Council which create opportunities to undertake and promote a positive message to the community about responsible pet ownership. This includes the provision of pound services, annual registration, exercising dogs, keeping dogs under effective control, socialisation of dogs, ownership of cats and the general welfare of domestic animals.

Whitehorse Council Community Laws Officers operate with the philosophy of Ask/ Tell/ Enforce where appropriate to the situation. Activities include:

- Proactive Park Patrols, talk to dog owners, educate on provisions of the Local Law
- Promoting desexing of dogs to reduce aggressive tendencies and wandering.
- Promoting early socialisation of dogs with other animals and humans
- Promoting regular exercise of dogs
- Responding to dog at large/ wandering complaints
- Responding to calls afterhours for dog attacks/dogs at large
- Following up owners of unregistered animals
- Annual audits of DABs

Complaint investigation

Results of an investigation may lead to one of the following enforcement activities:

- Seizure of identified dogs (where appropriate)
- Enforcement Proceedings
 - » Issue infringement
 - » Court proceedings
 - » Declaration of dangerous/menacing dogs
 - » A combination of the above

5.4 Appendix 4 — DAMPAC Terms of Reference

Purpose of the committee:

The Domestic Animal Management Plan Advisory Committee (DAMPAC) may provide guidance on:

- forums for improved domestic animal partnerships;
- a common understanding and shared purpose with regard to domestic animal management processes;
- integrated domestic animal planning in the urban environment through responsible pet ownership with a focus on education;
- domestic animal management initiatives; and
- domestic animal better practice;
- mechanisms for Whitehorse City Council to receive advice and work with our community

The role of the committee:

The DAMPAC is to provide advice to Council on:

- opportunities to promote responsible pet ownership;
- evaluation of activities undertaken;
- sharing knowledge and creating an environment of continuous improvement in the domestic animal urban environment; and
- community education strategies to promote responsible pet ownership.

Membership and attendance at meeting:

DAMPAC membership to include representation from the following agencies:

- Two Councillors
- An Executive Officer;
- Up to four representatives from peak body groups (such as RSPCA, Cat Protection Society, Bicycle Victoria and Australian Veterinary Association, Animal Aid);
- Up to four Community members;
- Council staff including Community Laws and Leisure and Recreation;
- Additional members as required (e.g. existing advisory committees or management groups); and
- Members must attend one meeting annually
- The chair to be elected annually by the Committee

Schedule of meetings and administration:

It is proposed that the DAMPAC will meet twice in the first year of each newly developed DAMP and then annually (minimum) as determined by the chair.

Administrative support requirements will be provided by Council staff with correspondence distributed electronically.

DAMPAC members may be required to undertake activities outside scheduled meeting timelines.

DAMPAC members will provide advice on mechanisms for Council to effectively engage and work with the community on domestic animal issues

5.5 Appendix 5 — Registration fees

Why pet registration is important

Pet registration is a legal requirement under the Domestic Animals Act 1994. You can be fined for not complying. However, there are many additional reasons to register your pet.

This section outlines some of the key community facilities and services that your dog and cat's registration fee pays for.

Facilities

Your pet registration fees may go toward providing the following facilities:

- dog parks, including off leash parks and fenced dog parks
- pounds and shelter facilities
- Signage and education

Reunification

Individualised registration tags for each of your registered dogs and cats.

Animal management staff to support the collection and return of stray animals to owners.

Events, incentive schemes and information

Events, incentive schemes and information may include:

- free information booklets and fact sheets
- pet expos
- community discounted microchip and desexing days
- discount incentive schemes for new registrations

Animal management staff

Staff are needed to:

- attend to nuisance complaints such as barking complaints, cat and dog trespassing complaints, wandering and stray animals
- attend to and investigate dog attack/bite/rushing incidents
- patrol parks, beaches and streets
- pick up stray cats and dogs

Training courses and programs are provided for animal management staff to ensure they have the most up-to-date information and skills in animal management

Animal management tools are provided to ensure animal management officers are able to perform their role in the most efficient and comprehensive manner.

Domestic Animal Business compliance

Your registration fee ensures that local government have sufficient staff to audit Domestic Animal Businesses, such as:

- pets shops
- breeding facilities
- boarding kennels
- catteries
- training establishments
- Shelters and pounds.

Auditing for compliance with the relevant mandatory codes of practice under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 provides both consumer protection and animal welfare assurances for the community.

Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dog management

Your registration fees cover the costs of staff to enforce the control of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs to ensure that owners are compliant with the legislation and ensure these dogs do not pose a threat to the community.

In addition, the registration fee covers the cost of the Victorian Declared Dog Register and database that tracks and records all declared dangerous, menacing, guard and restricted breed dogs.

Emergency animal welfare

Evacuation and relief centres

Your local council needs to know the number of dogs and cats within its municipality to ensure adequate evacuation and relief centres with enough resources are provided for everyone who may need to seek refuge for their animals.

Identifying locations where animals may have been left behind

Local council can also use registration information to identify homes where animals may have been left stranded in an evacuation. If you do not register your animals, in the event of an emergency — no one will know they are there.

Registration could be the difference between your animal being evacuated and cared for or not.

Exotic disease and biosecurity

The State Government uses pet registration information for responding to exotic disease threats that affect cats and dogs

Research

The State Government uses pet registration fees as a source of funding for research into dog and cat welfare. These research programs provide the government and the general public with valid and reliable information to maximise the welfare of our pets.

Document image references: Tim Parslow (Whitehorse resident)

Pexels: Blue bird, Dominic buccilli, Erik mclean, Evgculture, Helena Lopes, Lisa, Tamba budiarsana, Tranmautritam, Wojciech Kumpicki, Josh Hild.



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