



DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Engagement Summary
2 June 2025 – 1 July 2025

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea is reviewing its Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP). Under the provisions of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 each Victorian Council is required to prepare a domestic animal management plan at four-yearly intervals. The Domestic Animal Management Plan outlines the services, programs and policies City of Whittlesea has established to address the administration of the Act and the management of cats and dogs in the community. The aim of the Domestic Animal Management Plan is to promote responsible pet ownership for the welfare of cats and dogs in the community, while protecting the community and environment from nuisance cats and dogs.

Council undertook community consultation with people who live, work, study or visit the City of Whittlesea between 2 June and 1 July 2025 to understand current community sentiment towards the management of dogs and cats. The consultation explored key issues, objectives and priorities to guide how Council will manage and support responsible pet ownership. Given the diversity of residents across the municipality, the engagement aimed to explore what responsible pet ownership means to the community and identify what matters most to inform the updated *Domestic Animal Management Plan*.

The consultation included digital engagement through the *Engage Whittlesea* platform, 20 targeted community-based pop-ups and three community Focus Groups. The opportunity to participate was promoted via social media, emails to targeted stakeholder groups, direct email to registered animal owners, posters around the municipality and flyers. A total of 1,285 contributions were received from a diverse cross-section of our community.

How we engaged you

The Domestic Animal Management Plan project page on the *Engage Whittlesea* platform encouraged participants to share their knowledge about responsible pet ownership and the various animal related services Council offers through a short survey. The survey presented a variety of animal management topics including problematic behaviour of both cats and dogs, registration of animals, de-sexing of animals, council services, dog parks and animal focussed events in the City of Whittlesea. There was free text space provided for participants to add further comment as part of the questions.

The *Engage Whittlesea* platform utilises an accessibility add-on ensuring that it is as accessible as possible for all users. The platform also has an in-built translation tool to mitigate any language barriers to participation, allowing the page to be translated into the top fifteen languages spoken within the municipality.

In-person engagement activities

To reach a diverse range of community members and encourage participation, Council hosted 20 in-person engagement sessions across the municipality. These were held at various high foot traffic and targeted locations including shopping centres, dog parks, pet stores and at Council immunisation sessions, resulting in 277 contributions. In addition, three focus groups were held with community members who expressed interest in participating, with 39 people attending across the sessions.

Many participants at the in-person events noted it was their first time engaging directly with Council officers.

The community-based pop-up sessions held were:

Date	Time	Where	Address/location
Monday 2 June	8.30am - 10.30am	Whittlesea Public Gardens Dog Park	158 Barry Road, Lalor
Tuesday 3 June	5pm - 7pm	Galada Community Activity Centre (immunisation Session)	10A Forum Way, Epping
Wednesday 4 June	5pm - 7pm	Mernda Community Activity Centre (Immunisation Session)	70 Mernda Village Drive, Mernda
Thursday 5 June	3.30 - 5.30pm	Lyndarum Wetland Dog park	Manor House Drive, Epping
Friday 6 June	10am - 12pm	Shared Cup Café	995 Donnybrook Road, Donnybrook
Tuesday 10 June	9.30am - 11.30am	Mill Park All Abilities Play Space and Splash Park	40 Morang Drive, Mill Park
Wednesday 11 June	3pm - 5pm	Delacombe Reserve Fenced Dog Park	10W Wilton Court, South Morang
Thursday 12 June	3.30pm - 5.30pm	Laurimar Town Centre	101 Hazel Glen Drive, Doreen
Friday 13 June	10am - 12pm	Lalor Library	2A May Road, Lalor
Saturday 14 June	9am - 11am	Norris Bank Reserve dog park	135 McLeans Road, Bundoora
Saturday 14 June	12pm - 2pm	King of Paws	32/16 Dunstons Court, Thomastown
Sunday 15 June	10am - 12pm	Redleap Recreation Reserve	3-37 Redleap Avenue, Mill Park
Tuesday 17 June	10.30 - 12.30pm	Thomastown Library	54 Main Street, Thomastown
Wednesday 18 June	5.30pm - 7.30pm	Kirrip Community Activity Centre (Immunisation Session)	135 De Rossi Blvd, Wollert
Thursday 19 June	10am - 1pm	Refugee Week Event at Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre (PRACC)	35 Ferres Blvd, South Morang
Friday 20 June	10am - 12pm	Whittlesea Service Hub	63 Church Street, Whittlesea
Saturday 21 June	9am - 11am	Creek Park Dog Park	2W Perry Street, Mernda
Tuesday 24 June	10.30am - 12.30pm	Westfield Plenty Valley (community space opposite Coffee Club)	415 McDonalds Road, South Morang
Friday 27 June	10am - 12pm	Uni Hill Coles	224 Plenty Road Bundoora
Saturday 28 June	1pm - 3pm	Megapet Warehouse Epping	500 High Street, Epping



Above: Images of the project team engaging with the community

The community focus group sessions held were:

Date	Time	Where	Address/location
Tuesday 24 June	6pm - 9pm	Whittlesea CAC	57 Laurel Street, Whittlesea
Saturday 28 June	9.30am - 12.30pm	Great Hall, Civic TBC	25 Ferres Boulevard, South Morang
Monday 30 June	6pm - 9pm	Lalor Library Conference Room	2A May Street, Lalor

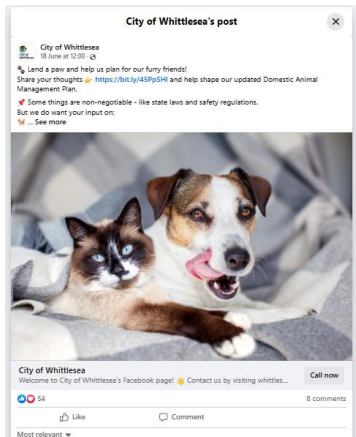


Above: Images of the community focus group sessions L – R, Whittlesea Community Activity Centre | 24 June, Civic Centre Fountain View Room | 28 June and Lalor Library Conference Room | 30 June 2025.

Project promotion

The opportunity to participate in the community engagement was promoted through a range of channels to have a widespread reach across the municipality including:

- council's digital engagement platform *Engage Whittlesea*
- social media
- direct email sent by key internal staff to their networks including all registered animal owners and community groups.



Above: Social media posts promoting the Domestic Animal Management Plan (10 social posts over a four-week period with 36,232 views and 217 interactions).

Participation

A total of 1,285 community contributions were received as part of the Domestic Animal Management Plan community engagement. Below is a snapshot of the consultation which was representative of our communities' demographics with exception of those that speak English as a second language which had lower participation.

Snapshot of community participation



277 people participated in-person across the 20 pop-up events.



969 people participated online via the *Engage Whittlesea* platform.



39 people attended the focus group sessions held at three locations.

Snapshot of participant demographics

Gender Identity



61% Female, 28% Male, 0.3% Non-binary, and 4% preferred not to say.

Age



All age brackets participated with the most represented being 45-54 years (23%), 35-44 years (21%) and 55-64 years (16%).

Suburb



Participants were represented well across all 11 Council wards, with the highest participation coming from the suburbs of Doreen (16%), Mill Park (12%) and South Morang (11%).

Pet Ownership



The type of domestic pets that participants owned were broken down as Cats (33%) and Dogs (62%).

LGBTIQA+ Community



6% of participants identified as members of the LGBTIQA+ community.

First Nations Community



2% of participants identified as being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Multicultural Community



14% of participants spoke English as a second language.

Community members living with or caring for someone with a disability



17% of participants identified as living with a disability or an unpaid carer of an older person or someone living with a disability.

What we heard

Majority of participants in the community engagement were current cat or dog owners. Over 90% of those we spoke to in-person were aware that dogs needed to be registered in the City of Whittlesea and almost three-quarters (72%) were aware of the 24/7 cat confinement laws.

In relation to dogs, dog waste left on the ground topped the list of concerns raised by community members, followed by dogs off-leash, dog on sporting grounds and dogs barking for extended periods. When it came to cats, cats roaming the streets and cats roaming outside on their properties were the most noticed concerns.

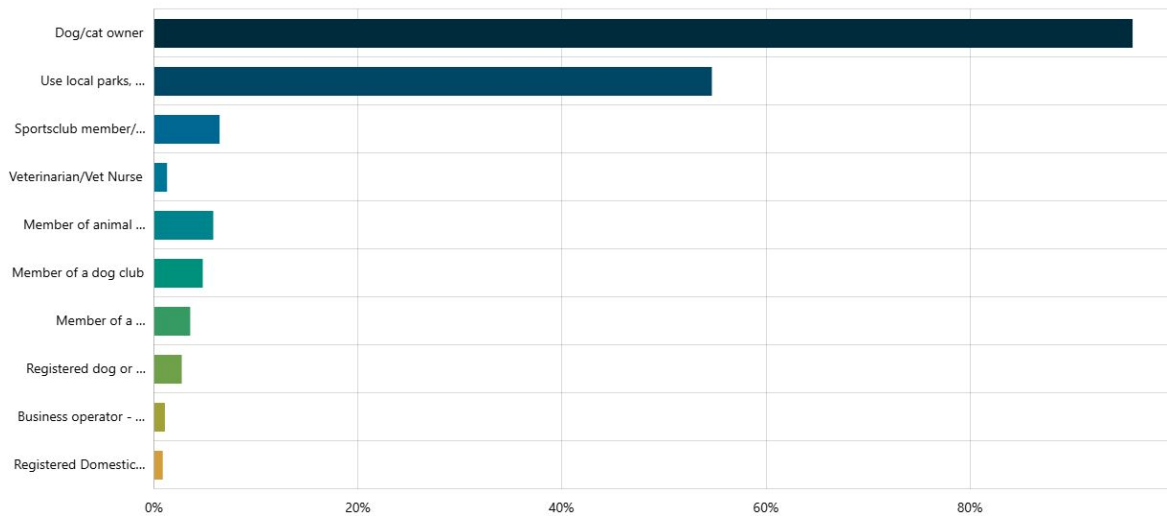
Below is a summary of what we heard from the community through the online and in-person consultation activities as well as from the community focus group. Where participants shared additional comments to specific questions as part of the online survey and we have grouped this feedback into key themes, with selected quotes included to illustrate common views and experiences.

Feedback from online consultation (*Engage Whittlesea* platform)



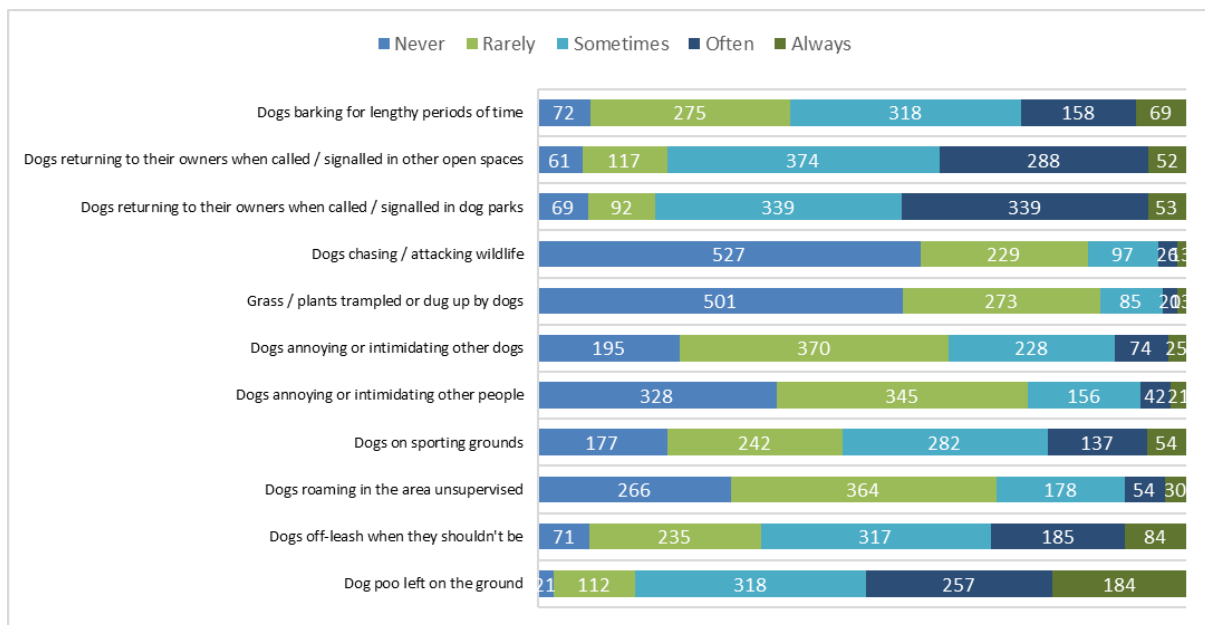
What is your interest in this topic?

Majority of participants were current cat or dog owners, local park users, or sporting club members. Participants also included veterinarians, vet nurses, members of animal groups or dog clubs, registered or domestic breeders, and owners of animal-related businesses, providing a broad and varied range of perspectives.



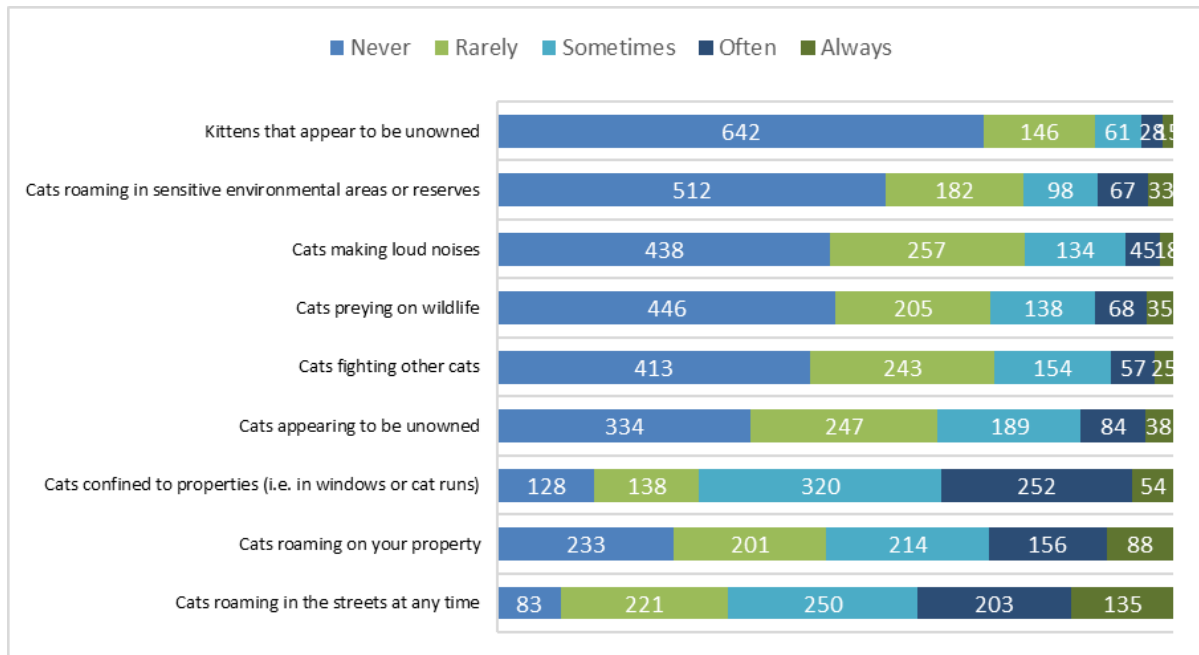
Have you noticed any of the following things about dogs when out and about in your local area?

Dog waste left on the ground topped the list of concerns raised by community members, followed closely by dogs off-leash and dogs barking for extended periods. Participants also noted positive behaviour/responsible dog owners highlighting good recall, dogs sitting calmly at cafés, and dogs that respond promptly to commands.



Have you noticed any of the following things about cats when out and about in your local area?

Some participants reported that cats roaming the streets at night and preying on wildlife remain ongoing concerns. At the same time, there was strong support for cats being kept indoors both day and night, suggesting the current cat curfew is having a positive impact.



How can Council improve its animal management services for pet owners?

Improve dog waste management

- Install more dog poo bag dispensers and bins, especially in high-use areas like Edgars Creek, Doreen, and Mernda.
- Consider free poo bag distribution, designated disposal stations, and public education campaigns.
- Stronger enforcement and even cameras were suggested to identify repeat offenders.

Enhance off-leash dog parks

- Expand access to larger, better maintained off-leash areas, and it was requested to include some of the more established suburbs such as Lalor.
- Add features like separate zones for large and small dogs, agility equipment, and water stations.
- Allow use of fenced sports fields outside of game times, following examples from other councils.

Address cat confinement concerns

- There were mixed views around cat confinement with some wanting a dusk-to-dawn curfew or to scrap the 24-hour rule, especially for older outdoor cats. Others support the curfew due to wildlife protection and neighbourhood peace.
- Stronger enforcement and reporting tools for roaming cats were requested.

Respond to roaming dogs and attacks

- Stricter leash law enforcement and more patrols in problem areas like East Thomastown Reserve.
- Calls for harsher penalties, mandatory obedience training, and better owner education.

Improve communication and access to information

- Improve the Council's responsible pet ownership webpage by making it clearer, offering downloads of multilingual brochures, and ensuring it is more user-friendly.
- Use flyers, workshops, or a dedicated app for education and reporting.
- Respondents also expressed a desire for clearer, more accessible information about pet registration fees, including how the fees are calculated, what they cover, and how they contribute to animal management and community services.

Reduce costs and support responsible ownership

- Lower registration fees for desexed, senior, or confined pets.
- Provide subsidised desexing and microchipping, especially for low-income owners.
- Consider incentives like discounted vet care or insurance for responsible pet owners.

Strengthen enforcement and follow-up

- Increase ranger patrols and improve response times to complaints.
- Use technology like cameras in off-leash areas.
- Adopt a more proactive approach to managing stray animals and resolving issues raised by residents.

"Recognise that not all cats have an inclination to prey on wildlife but many of them don't fancy being confined in their old age after a life of backyard freedom."

"Provide more rubbish bins to deposit dog poo and provide dog poo bags near bins to encourage dog owners to pick up after their dogs. More dog must be on lead signs in parks. More tree shade in Whittlesea off lead area."

"I think making your responsible pet ownership webpage more user friendly so that information is easily available would make a massive difference"

"Cheaper desexing days to promote desexing."

"Need out of hours support when finding stray animals.."



How can Council improve its animal management services for non-pet owners?

Stricter cat confinement enforcement

- Roaming cats were a major concern due to property damage, noise, and impacts on wildlife.
- Requests for more enforcement, access to cat traps, and better complaint guidance.
- Some disagreement about the 24-hour confinement – a few preferred a dusk-to-dawn curfew instead.

Address dog-related issues in public spaces

- Ongoing problems with dog defecating, especially in walking areas and sports fields.
- Calls for more poo bag dispensers and bins, particularly in places like South Morang.
- Concerns over off-leash dogs in prohibited areas and around vulnerable people.
- Stronger patrol presence and increased fines for non-compliance suggested.

Tackle barking and noise disturbances

- Barking dogs are a significant nuisance, with requests for better noise regulation enforcement.
- Suggestions included owner education on managing barking and improved complaint handling.

Improve communication and education

- Provide clearer, multilingual resources on pet-related laws and how to report issues.
- Suggestions for letterbox drops, website updates, and education on safe animal interaction.

Streamline complaints process

- Frustration with existing complaints handling process.
- Proposals for faster response times and easier tools like online forms or mobile apps for reporting.

"Patrol sporting grounds/open spaces regularly (day and after dark) for people not behaving responsibly with their dog (on lead/off lead) roaming animals etc"

"Provide Bylaws Officers during nighttime and early morning hours to detect cats that are roaming residential areas."

"More signs in parks and gardens regarding animal control and picking up after them. We have no signs in our parks so dogs are let off lead and the place is full of poop"



Which of the following topics need more promotion in the general community?

Participants were asked to identify topics they felt required greater promotion within the community. Information about the cat curfew received the highest level of support, followed by the following topics for increased community awareness. The top five responses were:

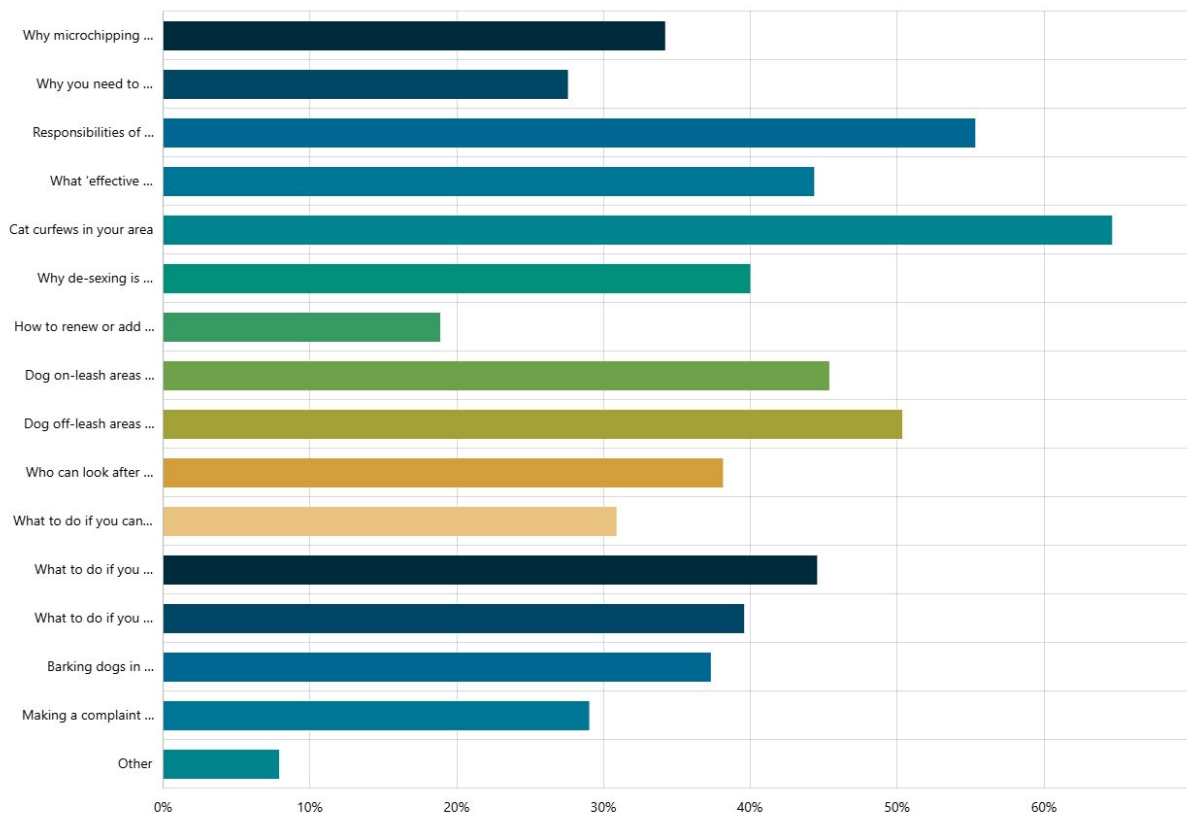
Cat curfews in your area – 312 (65%)

Responsibilities of dog owners when walking/exercising their dog – 267 (55%)

Dog off-leash areas and the rules – 243 (50%)

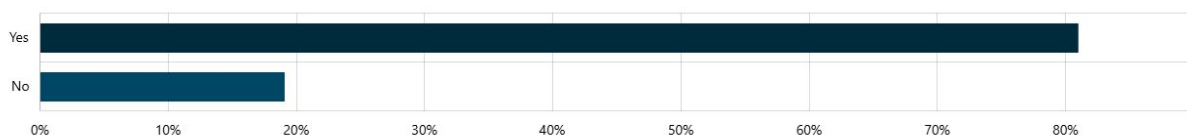
Dog on-leash areas and the rules – 219 (45%)

What to do if you find a lost pet – 215 (44%).



Should Council develop a dog off-leash policy which describes how new off-leash areas could be declared?

There was strong community interest in Council developing a dedicated dog off-leash policy. Participants felt that such a policy would provide clear guidance on how new off-leash areas could be identified, assessed, and officially declared. They also felt it would also help set consistent standards for location selection, signage, and community consultation, ensuring that future off-leash spaces meet both the needs of dog owners and broader community expectations.



Are there any other pet related events you would like to see in the City of Whittlesea? Practical and educational events

- Strong interest in affordable desexing, free microchipping, and puppy training, particularly for dogs affected by COVID lockdowns.
- Requests for pet health and behaviour education, including sessions on pet-friendly housing, dog attack prevention, and responsible pet ownership.

Social and community-focused activities

- Desire for more social opportunities such as dog meetups (including breed-specific, like sausage dog gatherings).
- Community dog walks (possibly charity-linked).
- Dry mushing (activity tailored for those breeds traditionally found in the snow such as Husky, Malamute and Samoyed) and dog-assisted walking clubs or expos.
- Calls for more pet-friendly public events and inclusion of dogs at council-run activities.

Rethinking the Pet Expo

- There was mixed feedback around the Pet Expo, with some seeing the current Pet Expo as ineffective or under-promoted. Some participants were unaware of the event entirely. Some suggestions/opportunities suggested to increase awareness of the Pet Expo were:
 - Direct mail to registered owners
 - Local social media promotion
 - Traditional media (radio, TV) outreach.
- Others suggested redirecting funds to practical support (i.e.: subsidised cat enclosures).

Better support for cat management

- Interest in cat trapping events, education on containment, and resources for indoor enrichment.
- The new cat curfew generated split opinions: some want stricter enforcement, others called for it to be rolled back.

Inclusion of other pets

- Interest in events for small animals like rabbits, guinea pigs, and rats.
- Suggestion to collaborate with specialist groups like The Rabbit Doctors.

Facility and service enhancements

Requests for:

- More dog parks (including small dog areas).
- Better maintenance and amenities (bins, water stations, agility equipment).
- Greater council support for rescues and pet adoption opportunities, including events like an open day at the Warrnambool animal facility.

"Pet first aid courses i.e. what to do in an emergency"

"Organised dog catch ups Free training tips - breed specific More information to pet owners on vaccinations and worming and immunisations for dogs to prevent spread of disease."

"Things to do with your dog. Bring your dog bbq or picnic?"

"Dog walking events, cat expo"



Are there any areas you think we need more dog off-leash parks?

High demand for more local off-leash areas

- Doreen was the most frequently mentioned suburb in need of an additional off-leash park.
 - Residents called for off-leash areas within walking distance, especially for those without transport.
- Suggested locations included:
- Under power lines near Lalor Plaza
 - Hilltop Park in Doreen
 - Around the lakes in Epping
 - Strong interest in dual-purpose parks, combining fenced dog areas with playgrounds or larger parklands.

Calls for better-equipped dog parks

- Desire for larger, more stimulating spaces—not just fenced paddocks.
- Requests for basic amenities, such as:
 - Running water
 - Poo bag dispensers
 - Lighting
 - Shaded seating areas

Concerns about safety and dog park management

Many residents avoid current dog parks due to aggressive dogs and irresponsible owners. Suggestions to improve safety included:

- Stronger enforcement and fines for non-compliance
- Separate zones for small vs. large dogs (or by breed)
- A bookable, single-use dog space to prevent conflicts
- A small number opposed off-leash areas altogether, citing safety and wildlife protection concerns.

"Every new suburb should have one or two dog parks."

"Another one in Whittlesea Township would be good, is gets very full quickly"

"Doreen and areas close to apartments and town houses. Near ovals and lakes where wildlife can be protected"

"I hate dog park areas it can be really feral and over whelming for a shy dog"



What do you think prevents people from registering their pets within the applicable time frame?

Financial barriers are a key obstacle

- Registration fees—especially for non-desexed pets—are seen as too high.
- Some owners delay registration until desexing, creating a timing gap.

- Respondents often feel there's no value for money, especially for indoor pets.

Lack of awareness remains a major issue

- Many owners are unaware of the requirement to register pets or don't understand how to do it.
- There's also confusion between microchipping and registration.
- Many of the comments indicate a need for clearer education and outreach, especially to new pet owners.

Unclear benefits of registration

- Some owners don't understand why registration matters, particularly if their pets are indoors.
- Better messaging is needed to explain benefits like pet recovery, community safety, and supporting animal services.

Indifference and disregard for rules

- A minority of participants cited laziness, irresponsibility, or a deliberate choice to avoid registration.
- Stronger enforcement and penalties may be needed for this group.

Process barriers and misconceptions

- Some described the registration process as complex or annoying, especially online.
- Suggestions included simplifying the process, improving the website, and offering better support.

Need to review policy and timing

- The cost differential for desexed vs. undesexed pets creates a dilemma for owners delaying surgery due to age or vet advice.
- Consider more flexible fee structures or registration timelines for young pets.

"Pets over 10 years of age (and continually registered) need to have reduced rates. If they are over 10, then it's pretty obvious that they are a treasured member of the family (again, only talking about registered animals.)"

"Cats that are confined to a property (in the house or in a cat run) 24/7 should get a discount as they're not using council resources. This would also encourage more people to keep their cats confined and limit the harm cats do to wildlife. If a cat gets trapped outside, they lose the discount"

Key themes from community pop ups

Twenty community pop-up sessions were held across the municipality at various locations, including dog parks, pet stores, libraries, and shopping centres. During these sessions, 277 community members participated by placing a dot on the board to indicate their views on common issues relating to both dogs and cats in the community. The feedback collected has been summarised, with selected quotes included to highlight community perspectives and feelings towards some of the topics.



Do you know that dogs need to be registered in CoW?

There was strong community awareness about the responsibility to register dogs with 92% indicating they knew dogs needed to be registered. Many participants discussed the appropriate age for registration, noting that different breeds have varying de-sexing requirements, which can make registration more expensive for some owners. There are still some members of the community who are unaware of their responsibilities in relation to pet registration.

What have you noticed in your local area?

Community members were asked to comment on a range of problematic behaviours observed in their local area. Like the online results the most frequently reported issue was dog waste left on the ground, followed by dogs off-leash and dogs present on sporting grounds. As the presence of dogs on sporting grounds breaches local law, staff sought specific details about which grounds were affected to help plan rosters for monitoring and enforcement. Below is what in-person participants had noticed in their local area:

- *Dog poo on ground – 181 (65%)*
- *Dogs off leash in undesignated area – 134 (48%)*
- *Dogs roaming streets unattended – 51 (18%)*
- *Dogs on sporting grounds – 126 (45%)*
- *Dogs Intimidating dogs/people – 80 (29%)*

“Dogs - people should only be able to have one dog and Pitbull type dogs (whose jaws lock) should have a muzzle in public”

“Need poo bag dispensers, community have made their own and put up signage”

“More off lead areas needed, larger open spaces”



Do you know that cats need to be confined to their property 24/7 in CoW?

Majority of participants were aware of the recent 24/7 cat confinement laws (72%), however, there was still a significant proportion (28%) who were unaware or who did not support the confinement or were unable to confine cats, especially their older cats.

What have you noticed in your local area?

Participants were asked about problematic cat-related behaviours in their local area. The most common concern were cats roaming freely in the street or on private property. However, there was also many who had observed responsible ownership practices, such as confining cats to outdoor enclosures, keeping them indoors, or ensuring they remain on their owner's property. Below is what in-person participants had noticed in their local area:

- *Cats roaming in the street – 143 (52%)*
- *Cats roaming on your property – 112 (40%)*
- *Correctly confined cats – 79 (29%)*
- *Cats appearing unowned/strays – 50 (18%)*
- *Cats fighting in the neighbourhood – 65 (23%)*

“Confining cats seems a bit unfair”

“Cats coming on to our property and eating our pet cat's food which causes a fight between cats.”

“Registration fee for cats should be relevant now that they are confined”

“More cat cages and assistance with stray cats”

Key themes from Community Focus Groups

Three identical community focus groups were held across the municipality with participants were asked to delve deeper into four topics being considered as part of domestic animal management planning. The feedback captured has been summarised, with selected quotes included to illustrate community view and feelings towards some of the suggested changes.



Mandatory dog de-sexing

Many of the participants in attendance supported making dog desexing mandatory, particularly to manage overpopulation and reduce shelter numbers.

“Too many dogs that need homes and too many dogs put down.”

“Desexing shows responsible pet ownership.”

Support for a transitional rollout

Most attendees agreed desexing should only be mandatory for new dog registrations or introduced gradually over time.

“Yes to it being transitional – if not, you may find some people may surrender their dogs.”

Opposition and concerns

A small number of participants were cautious or opposed, especially around the appropriate age for desexing and wanting to preserve owner choice.

“Don’t want choice taken away from me by implementing mandatory desexing.”

“Disagree with desexing from 3 months – it’s too young.”

Exemptions

There was broad agreement by focus group participants that some groups should be exempt, including:

- Registered breeders
- Working dogs (particularly in rural areas)
- Dogs with medical issues.

“Exemptions for registered breeders, vets, and AO members, this will allow more funds for education.”

“Medical exemptions (older animal, medical risk factors).”

Financial barriers

The cost of desexing was a commonly cited barrier. Many called for Council subsidies, discounts, or partnerships with vets to reduce costs.

“Cost is a barrier for many people – could City of Whittlesea partner with local vets for discounted desexing?”

“Offer free desexing of both cats/dogs for low-income households.”

Education and promotion

There was a strong push for more education about desexing benefits and best practices. Suggestions included school programs, public events, and accessible materials.

"The more promotion and education about the benefits of desexing dogs, the better."

"Need much clearer info on when to desex – risks vs. benefits so that owners can make an informed decision."

Risk of non-compliance

Several comments noted that mandatory desexing could backfire if not handled carefully, leading to more unregistered or surrendered pets.

"People will not register if it is mandatory."

"If you choose to wait to desex, the registration fee is higher, so people hold off registering."

Suggestions for Council support

Participants offered specific ideas for how Council can make mandatory desexing fair and achievable:

- Financial partnerships with vets
- Means-tested assistance
- Multiple pet discounts
- Public awareness events.

"Make a dog chart of breeding – similar to the cat one so people understand how it can become a problem."

"Education in schools especially primary schools, to learn about recognising signals of an aggressive dog and how to look after pets responsibly."



Cat population challenges

Semi-owned cats: a major challenge

Many participants raised concerns about semi-owned cats - those fed by multiple households but not formally owned. They felt it leads to overpopulation, lack of desexing, and roaming.

"People who feed 20 or 30 cats but only 'own' three."

"Someone needs to take ownership of the cats, not just feed them - care for them and keep them safely confined."

Cat overpopulation and breeding concerns

Uncontrolled breeding, especially among young or semi-owned cats, is contributing to cat overpopulation and associated impacts on the community and wildlife.

"Lots of immature cats (kittens) having kittens themselves."

"Too many cats still in the wild - upsetting dogs and impacting native wildlife."

Strong support for subsidised desexing

There was clear support from participants for continuing and expanding Council's subsidised cat desexing program, especially for semi-owned cats and low-income households.

"Yes - Council must continue subsidised desexing within budget."

"Should be means-tested or targeted for low-income earners."

More community education needed

Many participants called for more targeted education, especially within cultural and linguistically diverse communities, on responsible pet ownership, desexing, and confinement. They suggested this information be delivered in person to cultural groups or at the least in language.

"Better education for multicultural/religious groups - some countries have cats free roaming."

"Need more education about semi-owned cats - someone has to be responsible."

Mixed experience with cat curfews

There was general support for cat curfews, but some participants reported challenges - especially with older cats already used to roaming freely.

"There's been a huge positive difference with the cat confinement laws."

"Cat curfew was difficult for cats who were used to going out."

Community conflict and impact

Roaming cats have led to neighbourhood tensions, noise complaints, and interactions with dogs or wildlife. Education and clear communication tools could help.

"Crying cats at night... cats fighting can be noisy."

"A community member was physically assaulted by a neighbour for feeding stray cats."

Practical solutions and ideas

The community suggested several initiatives to reduce cat impacts and support owners including:

- Mobile desexing vans
- Grants/subsidies for cat enclosures
- Partnerships with local organisations
- Volunteer programs.

"Bring back the travelling desexing bus like we had years ago."

"Subsidies to make home cats contained (keep cats at home)."

"Mens' Sheds could help people build enclosures—community helping each other."

"Tap into vet students or animal management students to help trap and desex stray cats."

Suggestions for improved communication

Participants asked for more accessible, culturally appropriate and practical information - especially templates and guidance to deal with neighbour issues.

"Need a flyer or letter template on the website to talk to neighbours about roaming cats."

"Flyers should be in community languages with clear info on what to do."

Mixed views on euthanasia

Some participants reluctantly supported euthanasia in extreme cases where cats are unadoptable or suffering, though most preferred alternatives like foster care and managed trapping programs.

"If older or wild cats can't be rehomed, maybe euthanasia is best option."

"More advocacy for trap, neuter and release programs instead of euthanasia."



Barriers to pet registration

Cost was the most frequently mentioned barrier, especially for households with multiple pets, those on lower incomes, or where there is perceived low value in return. Suggestions to reduce barriers for the community identified by community focus group participants included:

- Introduce discounts for multiple pets
- Offer concession or loyalty discounts
- Provide pro-rata and first-year reduced rates
- Partner with vets or insurers for bundled savings
- All payments should be linked – Rates, animal registrations etc
- Snap, send, solve for animals
- Have allowance for early payment of registration (travelling etc)
- Story of dog registration payments – value add and what money goes toward.

"The cost of registering multiple animals with no discount is a barrier."

"Pet owners are financially struggling and not able to pay registration."

"Concession card holders – registration free for first year."

Perceived lack of value

Participants said they weren't clear on what pet registration pays for or how the community benefits from it. Participants would like to see more information about what pet registration pays for and suggested this could be done using infographics or videos showing the services supported by the registration fees. Participants suggested introducing a welcome pack for first time registered pets or those newly registered in the City of Whittlesea. They also suggested offering pet-related gifts from local businesses to further highlight value when registering pets.

"Value for registration – what you get for your money needs to be promoted."

"Where does the registration money go? It would be good to have a story or infographic about the allocation of registration costs."

Education and awareness

There's was a strong call from participants for more education, particularly for those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, on the benefits and importance of registration.

"Language and cultural education about the benefits of registration."

"Cultural group presentations – to explain Council rules and responsible pet ownership."

System and process improvements

Many residents found the online registration system challenging, especially when managing multiple pets. A user-friendly online portal for pet management was suggested in all three focus groups that allowed self-managed registration, microchip linking, renewals, ordering replacement tags etc.

Participants also suggested having QR codes on pet tags for quick re-ordering when they are damaged. Many participants commented that tags should be replaced more regularly as they become damaged, or the numbers are illegible.

Having colour-coded tags were also seen as helpful as the tag colour would change each year it would be easy to identify the registration status. They also suggested having colour coded tags that are updated each year would be helpful in identifying current registration status.

"It is difficult to register pets online. Would be good to have a one-place online option."

"Set up the system so you can pay for 2 or 3 pets at a time – currently separated which causes confusion."

Incentives and Rewards

Many suggestions made by focus group participants focused on rewarding responsible ownership to encourage registration. With loyalty or multi-year discounts suggested, giveaways for new registrations or partnerships with local pet-related businesses for promotional incentives.

"Send a gift box when fees are paid that includes pet gifts donated by local businesses."

"Discounted vet fees or pet food vouchers for registered pets."

Linking microchipping and registration

There was support for better integration of microchipping and registration data to reduce duplication and improve tracking. Participants agreed that cross-database integration would help a lot with breeder reporting obligations and automatic registration from microchip data linked to council through address of new owner.

"Registration and microchipping should be linked somehow."

"Breeders/sellers should be responsible for passing on new pet information directly to Council."

Communications and outreach

Participants recommended more advertising and reminders about registration, especially via digital platforms and pet-related locations. Pop-up events at local parks, pet shops, and shows, as well as email/SMS reminders for renewals and eye-catching communications using images of pets

“More advertising of the process and how easy it is to register.”

“Notices at pet stores with QR codes to register.”

“No notice of renewal makes it easy to forget - need better reminder systems.”



Dog parks in City of Whittlesea

Many participants raised concerns around safety in off-leash areas, particularly dog fights, reactive dogs, and poor owner supervision.

Suggested actions from focus group participants included:

- Introduce designated areas for reactive dogs
- Enforce a minimum recall requirement for off-leash access
- Use double gates and ensure secure fencing
- Introduce QR codes to report aggressive behaviour or upload incidents.

“Reactive dogs have nowhere to go in dog parks.”

“Only dogs with recall should use dog parks.”

“Unsafe dogs using facilities.”

Size, separation and design

There was strong support amongst focus group participants for dog parks to be thoughtfully designed by dog size, temperament, and access needs. They suggested:

- Split spaces for small, large, and reactive dogs
- Improve layout for safe entry/exit points
- Ensure shade, seating, and water are provided.

“Dog parks should have multiple areas: sensitive dogs/reactive dogs/larger dogs.”

“Separate dog parks for small dogs.”

“Redleap dog park can’t get into the quiet dog area without walking through the main area.”

Cleanliness, maintenance and amenities

Concerns around hygiene, waste, and upkeep came up in each focus group.

Suggested actions from focus group participants included:

- Installing more bins and poop bag dispensers
- Partnering with community groups for regular maintenance
- Improved rubbish removal schedules and vegetation management needed.

“Dog park is often full of dog poo at times.”

“Need more bins in parklands and walking tracks.”

“Better design water bowls (recycled plastics maybe?) – the metal ones get dirty or rusty.”

Etiquette and community education

Focus group participants want better signage and education for dog owners and other park users. They suggested:

- Add visible signage with visual icons for broader comprehension
- Provide QR codes for dog park rules, etiquette, and reporting
- Consider on-site education or patrols during peak times.

“Everyone needs to follow basic rules – eg. have control of your dog, pick up dog poo.”

“Large sign in front of each park with a picture of a dog to help non-English speaking backgrounds identify dog parks.”

Training, socialisation and community connection

Focus group participants felt that dog parks are not just for play, they’re also valued for education, training, and social connection. They suggested:

- Offer low-cost training sessions in parks
- Hold community events for dogs and owners
- Create a local dog owner network or club.

“Pop-up dog training in dog parks.”

“Learn to socialise with other dogs.”

“‘Barks in the Park’ community event run by Council.”

Infrastructure, access and facilities

Improved accessibility and upgrades to infrastructure were discussed at each focus group. Improvements to access paths, parking and lighting were all suggestions that came through, as well as installation of panic alarms and passive surveillance where appropriate. There was a suggestion of engaging the Men’s Shed or a similar group to build agility equipment or reusing unused playground equipment in dog parks to add some interest.

“More parking around dog parks.”

“Amount of use vs access and parking”

“Pet registration should indicate where dog parks need to be located to meet the demand”

Environmental impact and location suitability

Concerns were raised about off-leash dogs in unofficial or ecologically sensitive areas. Participants suggested:

- Map and sign official off-leash parks
- Redirect off-leash activity away from sensitive natural areas
- Use landscape planning to reduce habitat disruption.

“Mirrabucca wetlands are used as an off-leash dog park – this is a danger to kangaroos and other dog walkers.”

“When there are known unofficial dog parks, they need rules and signage.”

Next Steps

Thank you again to everyone who participated in the community engagement by sharing comments, feedback and participating in activities.

The insights captured through the consultation will help shape the development of the Domestic Animal Management Plan that will guide Council for the next four years. The draft plan will be shared for community feedback in September before being finalised and presented to Council for consideration and adoption in November 2025. We encourage you to follow engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/DAMP26 to keep up to date on the progress of this project.

Community feedback captured may also support the development of other key Council plans, strategies and projects, contributing to the vision of making Whittlesea *A Place for All*.