



Domestic Animal Management Plan

2026-2030



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1. Introduction and context

1.1 Purpose of Domestic Animal Management Plan

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

DAMPs set out how Council will:

- ensure that community members comply with the Act, the regulations and any related legislation
- minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals
- address any overpopulation and euthanasia rates for cats and dogs
- encourage the registration and identification of cats and dogs
- minimise the potential for cats and dogs to create a nuisance in the broader community
- effectively identify dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in the municipality and ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with this Act and the Regulations
- provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and the Community Local Law 2024 that relate to the Council's municipality to determine whether further orders or Local Laws for the management of cats and dogs are appropriate
- provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan. And review any other matters related to the management of cats and dogs that Council deems necessary

The DAMP is framed noting the benefits of pet ownership for people's health and wellbeing, which include:

- preventing loneliness
- motivating people to exercise regularly
- creating opportunities to meet people and make new friends
- teaching responsibility, as pets require ongoing care

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



1.2 Process applied in developing the plan

Council's DAMP was developed in partnership with two neighbouring Councils, Darebin and Merri-bek. An inter-organisational working group was established to encourage partnership and achieve best practice. The DAMP was developed through four stages, as set out below.

Stage 1: Background research

A review of the local government area, relevant state and local policies, review of Council's current DAMP, emerging issues in domestic animal management, and current animal management statistics.

Stage 2: Community consultation

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

Approximately **1,285 people** who live, work, or visit the City of Whittlesea provided their input to help shape the Plan.

Snapshot of participant demographics



62% dog owners



33% cat owners



61% Female



28% Male



4% preferred not to say



0.3% non-binary



All age brackets participated with the most represented being

45-55 years (23%),



35-44 years (21%) and



55-64 years (16%)



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%)



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



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



14% of participants spoke English as a second language



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

Feedback was gathered through four methods

- A detailed online survey which was available through a dedicated project webpage
- Three Community Focus Groups, at three locations in the City of Whittlesea
- Community pop-ups held at key venues and locations across the local area
- Telephone interviews conducted with key stakeholders.



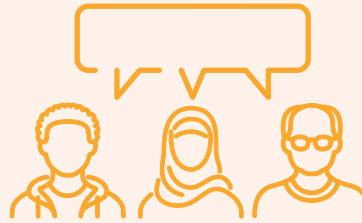
Online survey

969 surveys completed



20 Community Pop-ups

277 participants



3 Focus Groups

39 participants



Key stakeholder interviews

10 key stakeholders interviewed

The feedback received from community members has informed the priorities and actions outlined in the DAMP.



The following provides a snapshot of the findings from the online survey.

- 92.8% Strongly agree (86.3%) or agree (6.5%) that pets provide comfort and support
- 91.9% strongly agree (85.4%) or agree (6.5%) that pets are an important part of the family
- 61% strongly agree (43.2%) or agree (17.8%) that they exercise more because they have a dog
- 52.2% strongly agree (30.9%) or agree (21.3%) that they talk to more people in the neighbourhood because they have a dog.



The top three things noticed about dogs when out and about in the local area were:

- dog faeces left on the ground
- dogs off-leash where they shouldn't be
- dogs barking for lengthy periods of time.



The top three things noticed about cats when out and about in the local area were:

- cats roaming in the streets at any time
- cats roaming on your property
- cats not confined to properties (contained to the indoor of the property or a cat enclosure).



Level of satisfaction with aspects of the wat djerring Animal Facility

- 83% very satisfied (55%) or satisfied (28%) with helpfulness of staff
- 84% very satisfied (54%) or satisfied (30%) with professionalism of staff
- 81% very satisfied (51%) or satisfied (30%) with timeliness of service
- 85% very satisfied (57%) or satisfied (28%) with overall level of service.



Top three topics that need more promotion in the general community

- Responsibilities of dog owners when walking a dog
- What 'effective control' of a dog means
- 24-hour cat confinement.



Barriers to registering pets within applicable time frame

- Financial difficulties
- Unaware of registration requirements and how to register
- Unsure of the benefits of registering pets
- Microchipping mistaken as registration (both are mandatory requirements under the Act).



Support for introduction of mandatory desexing for newly registered dogs

- Yes 40%
- Unsure 31%
- No 29%.

Key themes from community engagement

Theme	Key sub-theme
Responsible pet ownership	- Improving owner behaviours and control of animals - Increasing community education about responsible pet ownership - Fostering partnerships with local vets and rescues
Dog attacks	- Increasing education around dog behaviour, selecting the 'right' dog and effects of dog attacks - Increasing patrols and enforcement of dogs on-lead
Overpopulation of cats and dogs	- Increasing low cost and subsidised desexing - Increasing re-homing rates for pets surrendered - Stopping illegal and irresponsible backyard breeding - Reducing stray cats - Providing education to the community
Registration and identification of cats and dogs	- Educating the community on the benefits and process of pet registration - Improving the ease of registering a pet
Protection from nuisance	- Addressing pet owners leaving dog faeces in public places through proactive patrols - Addressing dogs barking and noise from cat fights - Enforcing cat curfew to ensure safety of cats and wildlife - Proactively patrolling of dogs off-leash in public, including sporting grounds - Increasing signage on dog etiquette and control at dog parks
Dangerous and restricted dogs	Addressing aggressive dogs in off-leash parks, through increased patrols and penalties for owners
Review of Council services	- Increasing patrols and visibility - Increasing community education - Improving Wat djerring Animal Facility services

Stage 3: Joint Council planning

Relevant Council officers from Darebin, Merri-bek and City of Whittlesea participated in a joint Council planning session to analyse the community feedback, determine appropriate actions for their respective DAMPs and identify opportunities for partnerships and cost saving.

Stage 4: Public exhibition

To be updated following public exhibition.

1.3 Demographic Profile of Council

The City of Whittlesea is in Melbourne's north, approximately 20km from the Central Business District (CBD). It is one of the largest municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne, which is more than 60% rural or non-urban area covering approximately 490 square kilometres in total, with a mix of established suburbs, growth areas and rural communities.

Urban areas include:

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

Rural areas include:

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



The City of Whittlesea is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia. The population for 2025 is currently

257,000, with a projected growth of population to be 355,000 by 2040.



The City of Whittlesea is one of the most multicultural municipalities in Victoria. In 2025,

37.6% of residents were born overseas and 45% spoke a language other than English at home.



17% of the population is over 60, the median age is expected to shift from 35 to 39 years by 2040.



We have the **third largest** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in metropolitan Melbourne.



Community demographic snapshot



Median age is
35 years old



37.6%
were born overseas (compared to
36% in Greater Melbourne)



54%
are households with children
(compared to 33% in
Greater Melbourne)



45%
speak a language other than
English at home (compared
to 34% in Greater Melbourne)



18.2%
are lone person households
(compared to 24% in
Greater Melbourne)



19.1%
worked at home (compared
to 29% in Greater Melbourne)



14.5%
live in medium and high-density
housing (compared to 34% in
Greater Melbourne)



4.5%
attend university (compared
to 6% in Greater Melbourne)



24.2%
are renting (compared to 29%
in Greater Melbourne)



Figure 1: Map of City of Whittlesea Municipality



1.4 Context and current situation

Animal Management Services

Council provides a broad range of services to ensure it meets legislative responsibilities regarding the management of domestic animals within the municipality. Council is also responsible for ensuring the needs of the wider community are reflected within domestic animal management policies, procedures and practices.

Council provides animal management services through a dedicated animal management unit and it's running of the wat djerring Animal Facility. Services include:

- educating the community through public events and proactive patrols
- providing advice to the community regarding domestic animal matters and responsible pet ownership
- investigating nuisance animal complaints and dog attacks
- attending to animal complaints
- managing Council's domestic animal collections
- managing the wat djerring Animal Facility pound service contracts with Darebin and Merri-bek.
- maintaining a domestic animal register and undertaking registration checks
- Impounding wandering, unwanted or unowned cats and dogs
- providing administration and control of dangerous, menacing, and restricted breed dogs
- providing an after-hours emergency service for dog attacks
- registering and inspecting domestic animal businesses
- providing administration and inspection of excess animal permits

1.5 Domestic animal statistics

A high-level summary of the current population and service numbers for domestic animals in the City of Whittlesea from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

Program/Service:	Service Level:
Identification and Registration	18,104 dogs 8,585 cats
Animals impounded	2,514
Animals reclaimed	514 animals reclaimed by their owners
Animals rehomed	769 animals were adopted and 560 were transferred to rescue groups or pet stores
Registered domestic animal businesses	15 in total 5 pet shops, 6 dog training establishments, 2 boarding establishments, 1 animal shelter and 1 breeding establishment
Desexing programs	Council desexing program in conjunction with Cat Protection Society cat desexing program available throughout each year. In late 2024/FY25 Council commenced a government granted cat desexing program this will continue until 30 June 2026 or until all funds are exhausted.

2. Training of staff

To deliver animal services that meet the requirements of the Act, to the level that the community expects, it is crucial that staff are appropriately trained and take part in regular training programs.

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

2.1 Planned Training for Staff

Council has planned a thorough training program for staff to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the requirements of the Act and deliver service in a manner that the community expects.

Planned Training of Staff (2026-2030)	Expected Timeframe
OH&S - Dealing with aggressive customers - Working in remote areas - Conflict resolution	Every 2 years or as new staff commence
Industry Training - Animal handling - Animal assessment - Prosecutions - Statement taking - Evidence gathering	Every 2 years As other training opportunities arise
Restricted Breed Dog Identification	Every 2 Years
Training to improve the capability and ensure that staff are equipped with the skills and experience to meet the needs of the community - Compliance training - Customer service - Responding Family violence	Ongoing



3. Programs to promote and encourage responsible pet ownership and compliance with legislation

Responsible pet ownership was a key theme that emerged from the community consultation. There was a strong desire for community education around topics such as responsibilities of dog owners when walking dogs, what ‘effective control’ of a dog means, as well as 24-hour cat confinement.

Through the development of the Plan, a number of key stakeholders had expressed an interest in partnering with Council to deliver education programs on these topics as well as others, including domestic animals and wildlife, cat and dog behaviour, how to help injured animals, microchipping and desexing.

3.1 Context and current situation

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

- educating the community about responsible pet ownership, including the benefits of desexing, registration and microchipping.
- providing an off-leash dog park location map
- using a Lost Animals in the City of Whittlesea Facebook page to help reunite pets with their owners.
- temporary accommodation of residents’ pets to support family violence victims or survivors in an emergency or crisis, including those experiencing homelessness.

Introduction of Cat Curfew and mandatory cat desexing

On 18 July 2022, Council endorsed the introduction of a 24-hour cat curfew and mandatory cat desexing for newly registered cats, which came into effect on 1 August 2023. These changes were endorsed and implemented following the adoption of the previous Domestic Animal Management Plan (2021-2025) which was informed by extensive community consultation. 80% of residents wanted confinement of cats in some way (44.9% 24 hour and 35.6% dusk to dawn), and 82% of residents wanted desexing to be mandatory (64.1% mandatory desexing, 78.5% if costs are subsidised).

Support was provided to pet owners to transition to the new regulations, which were introduced to create a safer and more harmonious environment for cats, wildlife and their owners. Council implemented a dedicated webpage to provide information and support to help transition cats to staying at home. Within the first six months of the new regulations, the number of complaints relating to cats received by Council had decreased by 70% from the previous year.

Dog Parks

Through funding from the Victorian Government’s New and Upgraded Dog Park Program, Council opened a brand new off-leash dog park at Allumba Park in Wollert and upgraded the Whittlesea Public Gardens off-lead dog park with a fresh new look and upgrades. Community consultation informed the development of the concept plans for the parks. There are now eleven off-leash dog parks in the City of Whittlesea.

The additional dog off-lead parks and upgrades are supported by the community, with feedback requesting additional dog off-lead parks in areas such as Doreen, Lalor, Epping and Mernda. There were requests for better safety and design of dog off-lead areas, with suggestions such as separate areas for small and large dogs, agility equipment, water stations, shade and better maintenance. While many support more off-lead dog parks, safety concerns were prevalent with common issues such as dog fights, poorly trained dogs and irresponsible owners.

3.2 Our plan

It is imperative that Council promotes responsible pet ownership through various advertising and engagement opportunities.

Objective: Promote responsible cat and dog ownership

Activity	When	Evaluation
Communicate through website, social media, Council and community events and local pet stores to promote responsible pet ownership	Ongoing	Social media likes, shares and engagement, website analytics. Number of participants
Run a campaign about the importance of responsible pet ownership, sending information or QR codes for information out with renewal notices	Annually	Number of complaints Number of participants
Host an event in partnership with City of Darebin and Merri-bek City Council to bring together pet stakeholders (Vets, rescue groups, shelters, dog trainers) to share information and services with the community	Annually	Number of participants
Partner with local veterinary clinics to share information with pet owners about responsible pet ownership	Ongoing	Number of vet participants

Community engagement and internal data analysis have highlighted important insights into dog desexing in our community. Council data shows that approximately 55% of impounded dogs are not desexed, and in 99% of prosecuted dog attacks, the dogs involved were not desexed.

These findings suggest a potential link between desexing and animal behaviour outcomes. However, further research and engagement with our community and stakeholders is essential to fully understand the implications and community sentiment around mandatory desexing policies.

Objective: consider mandatory dog desexing

Activity	When	Evaluation
Undertake further community consultation and research regarding the introduction of mandatory dog desexing for new registrations	March 2027	Support for the introduction of mandatory dog desexing
Develop draft mandatory dog desexing policy/local laws for new registrations to be desexed (subject to community consultation supporting the introduction of mandatory desexing for new dog registrations)	July 2027	Policy endorsed
Partner with local vet clinics to promote the benefits of desexing dogs	March 2027	Number of partnerships developed Number of information packs developed
Continue discounted pet desexing program for concession card holders	Ongoing	Number of program participants

Council uses various proactive measures to manage cat population

Objective: Management of cat population

Activity	When	Evaluation
Develop a survey and invite participation from the community regarding the ongoing management of our cat population	Every 3 years	Number of program participants
Promote the benefits of containing cats to their owner's property using materials developed through Safe Cats, Safe Wildlife and include the resource as part of the information pack given with registrations	Ongoing	Social media and engagement webpage analytics and time spent on page
Review cat trapping service and develop a more efficient service to meet needs of community	Ongoing	Number of cat trap requests



4. Programs to address overpopulation and euthanasia rates

Overpopulation in cats and dogs presents challenges in the community including impacts on wildlife, people and other cats and dogs. There are also impacts on the welfare of cats and dogs if they are stray, semi-owned, or malnourished due to limited capacity of owners to care for them.

During the community engagement program, key stakeholders highlighted the need for low cost desexing of animals, increased re-homing efforts and reducing illegal and irresponsible backyard breeding to help combat overpopulation and euthanasia rates. Community education was seen as important to help the community understand the importance of desexing and the impact of un-desexed cats roaming in the community.

4.1 Context and Current Situation

Council has a commitment to proactively address over-populations of domestic animals.

In some cases, when an animal is suffering from serious injury, illness, or has behavioural issues that make it unsafe to be rehomed, humane euthanasia may be considered as a last resort. These decisions are guided by a range of legislative frameworks and are carefully reviewed by Council's ethics committee to ensure they are made with compassion, care, and in the best interest of the animal and the community.

	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
Dogs				
Impounded	563	496	798	679
Rehomed	109	40	274	220
Reclaimed	Data not available	Data not available	462	368
Euthanasia (based on animal being diseased, seriously injured, having illness or being unsafe/ unsuitable to rehome)	65	71	94	85
Cats				
Impounded	1,082	857	1,978	1,835
Rehomed	1,047	191	1,180	1,109
Reclaimed	Data not available	Data not available	129	146
Euthanasia (based on animal being diseased, seriously injured, having illness or being unsafe/ unsuitable to rehome)	379	473	305	258

Reclaiming rates for dogs are strong, with over 50% of impounded dogs returned to their owners in FY24 and FY25. Cat reclaiming remains low, highlighting the challenges with overpopulation and importance of microchipping and registration.

Rehoming rates for both dogs and cats have significantly improved since FY22, especially for cats, with over 60% successfully rehomed in FY24 and FY25. This reflects Council's commitment to achieving the best possible outcome for impounded animals.

In FY24 and FY25, Council recorded the highest number of impounded animals yet achieved the lowest euthanasia rates across the four-year period. This reflects significant improvement in outcomes, driven by proactive strategies and strong community partnerships.

For cats, euthanasia rates dropped markedly, from 35% in FY22 to 14% in FY25. This positive shift highlights the success of targeted desexing programs, increased rehoming efforts, the quality-of-care impounded animals receive, and collaboration with rescue organisations.

For dogs, euthanasia rates remained relatively stable, rising slightly from 11% to 12% in FY25. These figures suggest consistent and considered decision making, guided by Council's ethics committee.

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

Council's current educational and promotional activities include:

- providing relevant information via website, social media and Council publications, and Council events.
- providing prompt proactive and reactive enforcement services

Stray cats free desexing program

Council received a \$20,000 grant from Animal Welfare Victoria to deliver a fully funded desexing program for stray cats, and cats that aren't officially owned but rely on residents for food, shelter, and care. The program will run from June 2025 until June 2026, based on availability of funding.

This program encourages residents to take the next step in caring for these cats by offering:

- free desexing
- microchipping
- one year of free council registration

Mandatory dog desexing

There are various benefits to desexing, which include improved behaviour, reduced risk of disease and increased life of dog, decreased aggression, prevention of unwanted pregnancies, reduced registration fees.

In the online engagement survey, participants were asked if they thought Council should introduce mandatory desexing for newly registered dogs, 40% of respondents selected yes, followed by 31% who were not sure and 29% who selected no.

The majority of focus group participants supported mandatory dog desexing and indicated that any future policy should consider reasonable transitional provisions and exemptions. Participants called for Council to provide subsidised desexing and provide education to the community about the correct timing and benefits of desexing dogs.

Further community engagement and research are proposed to ascertain whether mandatory dog desexing should be introduced for newly registered dogs.



4.2 Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

It's imperative that Council provides clarity in how we educate and regulate key issues in the municipality while meeting the needs of the community.

Local Laws:

- Community Local Law 2024 Part 4

Compliance Activities

- Free use of cat traps for residents and businesses
- Cat trapping programs in public areas
- Personalised cat trapping programs for residents who are unable to do it themselves
- Attendance and assistance with situations of animal hoarders
- Excess animal permit system to manage the number of animals per property
- Annual registration renewal follow-up and audit
- Door knocking programs throughout the municipality
- Proactive patrols of parks and public open spaces
- Inspections of excess animal permits
- Property inspections following information received from the public
- Investigating all nuisance animal complaints including detecting unidentified animals; and
- Enforcement of legislation.

4.3 Our Plan

To decrease the number of strays, abandoned and unwanted pets

Activity	When	Evaluation
Partner with City of Darebin and Merri-bek City Council to seek partnership/funding to conduct a mobile desexing program	As grant funding is available	Number of participants
Partner with City of Darebin, Merri-bek City Council and mental health support services to develop a strategy to manage cat and dog hoarding	By December 2026	Pet Hoarding strategy developed

To minimise the number of animals euthanised

Activity	When	Evaluation
Encourage partnerships between shelter and rescue groups	Ongoing	Number of Partnerships
Effective management to reduce hoarding and illegal breeding	Ongoing	Number of Successful cases



5. Registration and identification

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

The top three reasons selected by the community as prevention for registering a pet in the required timeframe were financial difficulties (31%), lack of awareness of the registration requirements (27%) and lack of awareness of the benefits of registration (16%). This suggests the need for additional education and communication about the process and benefits of pet registration.

Financial concerns are a barrier with many respondents commenting registration costs are high, particularly for non desexed animals as a reason for not registering or delaying registration until their pet is old enough to be desexed to attract the lower fee. This suggests the need to review the fee structures for pets that are considered too young to desex to increase registration rates.

5.1 Context and current situation

There are currently 18,104 registered dogs and 8,585 registered cats in the City of Whittlesea. It is difficult to capture data on the actual ownership population of animals, as we know that not all cats and dogs are registered.

New registrations made up 13% of all dog registrations and 18% of cat registrations, indicating a steady rate of new pet ownership. Concessions were accessed for 2.7% of all dog registrations and 5.1% of all cat registrations.

There were 893 offences or prosecutions related to unregistered animals, showing the continued importance of education and enforcement around pet registration responsibilities.

Registration and microchipping numbers of cats and dogs for FY25

Registration Numbers	Dogs	Cats
Total	1,8104	8,585
New	2,298	1,569
Renewals	17,441	8,199
Concessions	494	439
Offences/prosecutions for unregistered animals	893	

Council provides the following educational and community awareness activities.

- Providing half price registrations for new pets from 10 October each year until 9 April.
- Following up registrations for cats and dogs purchased from pet shops and shelters
- Utilising microchip scanners on patrols
- Providing first year free registrations for animals rehomed from animal rescue group organisations
- Providing promotional material and reminders to register your pet via postal mail; text messaging; officers on patrol; corporate communications such as the Local News newsletter, local newspapers and 'Messages on Hold'; website; Customer Service Centres
- Requiring all domestic animal businesses to carry registration application forms

5.2 Our Plan

Council is committed to having all cats and dogs registered and will proactively work to increase registration rates. Council is aware there are unregistered pets in the municipality, there are a number of measures that can be used to reduce unregistered pets.

Increase the number of cat and dog registrations

Activity	When	Evaluation
Promote registration discounts and concessions available for desexing and microchipping animals through Council events, website, social media, local vets and rescue homes	Annually	Number of discounts/ concessions used Number of participants Number of online analytics
Promote registration through proactive online pet record research and following up with enquiries and communications with owners	Annually	Number of door knocks undertaken Number of pets registered through door knock

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

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct a survey with online users to seek feedback on the ease of use of the system	October 2026	Number of participants
Implement improvements to the registration system based on feedback	October 2027	Number of promotions and reach



6. Nuisance animals

Council has a role in protecting the community from unnecessary nuisance from cats and dogs through their services and community education. Community concerns include dog faeces, cats roaming the streets or other properties, dogs off-lead when they shouldn't be and dogs barking for lengthy periods of time.

6.1 Context and current situation

The table below outlines the number of customer contacts received by Council about nuisance and safety issues related to cats and dogs. In FY25, reports of barking dogs remained relatively steady, while requests for cat cages increased significantly, more than doubling from 367 in FY24 to 981 in FY25. This rise may be linked to the introduction of cat curfew requirements, which has likely encouraged more residents to help manage roaming cats.

There was also a sharp increase in domestic animal pick-up requests and reports of wandering dogs, both reaching their highest levels in four years. This may reflect growing community awareness of responsible pet ownership or an increase in unsupervised animals in public areas.

Dog attacks and rushes remained stable over the four-year period, with a slight increase in FY25. Complaints about animal related issues such as off-leash dogs, unregistered pets, or animal faeces being left in public places have gradually declined since FY22. This may suggest improved compliance or more effective community education and enforcement.

Nature of Complaint	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
Barking dogs	211	196	276	263
Domestic animal pick up	1305	1016	1517	2,122
Wandering dog requests	221	264	218	504
Dog attack with serious injury to a person	15	29	26	28
Dog Attack with serious injury/death to an animal	24	41	29	26
Cat cage requests	407	238	367	489
Dog attacks and rushes	140	175	150	173
Infringements for non-compliance with the Local Law (including unregistered dog/cat, defecating, off-lead in park/reserve and excessive animals)	4,979	4,485	4,150	4,091

Council's current educational and promotional activities.

- Providing information and advice on methods for resolving nuisance in the community.
- Encouraging complainants to speak to the owner of the animal causing the nuisance directly and as early as possible
- Providing a barking dog diary and noise nuisance complaint form that under the Act is required to be filled out by the complainant
- Providing prompt proactive and reactive enforcement activities and proactively patrols parks and open spaces within the municipality.

6.2 Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

Local Laws

- Community Local Law 2024 Part 4

Policies and Procedures

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

Current compliance activities

Council Staff respond to complaints, undertake investigations, issue infringements and, when necessary, prosecute. In the first instance, education and prevention are more effective ways of dealing with these matters rather than enforcement.

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

6.3 Our Plan

Reduce the number of nuisance complaints that arise in the Municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Increase patrols of open spaces for dogs off-lead	Ongoing	Number of patrols Number of infringements issued
Promote exercising dogs to reduce barking complaints	Ongoing	Number of barking complaints
Explore technology-based solutions to support community members recording evidence of noise nuisance and excessive barking	December 2026	Reduced resolution timeframes for noise nuisance complaints
Promoting the implications of dog attacks	Ongoing	Number of dog attack complaints

Reduce the number of instances of dog faeces left by owner in public space

Activity	When	Evaluation
Promote responsible pet ownership resource regarding dog faeces in the community	Ongoing	Number of complaints
Audit dog waste bins across the municipality and consider providing biodegradable bags	June 2026	Number of dog waste bins installed Number of biodegradable bags used
Implement signage about cleaning up after your dog in public spaces	Annually	Number of complaints received

7. Dog attacks

Unfortunately, dog attacks against people and other animals do occur in the municipality. The community raised concerns about roaming dogs and dog attacks, calling for stricter enforcement and increased patrols.

7.1 Context and current situation

Over the past year (FY25), Council responded to or was alerted to 173 dog attack complaints of varying severity. There are currently 20 dogs deemed as dangerous or menacing in the municipality. Complaints are reported by email, phone, or online. A total of seven matters proceeded to court and were all successfully prosecuted.

Information	Number
Dog attacks investigated of varying severity	173
Number of of dog attacks prosecuted	7

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

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

7.2 Current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

Local Laws

- Prohibiting exercising of dogs off-lead, other than in designated places
- Animals allowed per household without an excess animal permit

Compliance activities

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

7.3 Our Plan

Decrease the number of confirmed dog attacks in the community

Activity	When	Evaluation
Explore whether guidelines around the use of off-leash dogs are necessary to promote responsible pet ownership and prevent dog attacks	June 2027	Number of attacks/rushes Guidelines developed and endorsed
Provide proactive and visible patrols at dog off-leash parks	Ongoing	Number of attacks/rushes in on-leash vs off-leash Number of infringements issued
Review, update, and improve data collected from dog attack incidents and develop initiatives to proactively respond to any identified drivers	December 2026	Review completed and reporting mechanism established

Increase community awareness of how to report dog attacks

Activity	When	Evaluation
Customer service review to measure customer service satisfaction, including timeliness, professionalism and responsiveness when dealing with dog attacks	Ongoing	Feedback received Customer Satisfaction Scores
Advertise via website, social media, events and focus groups	Ongoing	Analytics data and number of participants



8. Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

The community's understanding of what constitutes a dangerous or restricted breed dog may not broadly align with the classifications as per the Act, however it was clear from the community engagement program that there was some community concern about dangerous dogs in the community and poor management by owners. There were calls for stricter enforcements of leash laws, increased patrols and harsher penalties for owners of aggressive dogs.

8.1 Context and current situation

The City of Whittlesea currently has 20 dogs with restrictions (Table 22), including dangerous, menacing, restricted breed, and guard dogs. This includes 8 dogs declared dangerous and 10 declared menacing. A total of 20 property audits were conducted regarding dangerous dogs during 2024/25. There were 53 complaints received related to dangerous dogs, with no prosecutions or court cases during this period.

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

Note: Restricted breed dogs have not attacked or displayed signs of aggression. However, the state government has identified certain breeds of dogs that are a higher risk to community safety.

8.2 Current Policies and Procedures

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

Compliance activities

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

Information	Number
Dogs declared dangerous	8
Dogs declared menacing	10
Restricted breed dogs	1
Guard dogs	1
Total	20
Complaints received re: declared dogs	53
Audits conducted re: declared dogs	20

City of Whittlesea’s current education/promotion activities.

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

8.3 Our Plan

Identify and register all declared dogs in the City of Whittlesea

Activity	When	Evaluation
Cross-reference microchip databases with current Council registration database to identify potential restricted breed dogs	Ongoing	Number of dogs recorded
Ensure all declared dogs are recorded on the Victorian Declared Dog Registry (VDDR) and the VDDR is kept up to date	Ongoing	Number of dogs recorded

Ensure all declared dogs are compliant with relevant legislation and regulations

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct random property inspections of declared dogs to ensure compliance	Ongoing	Number of random property checks
Develop a standard operating procedure for checking property compliance and what to do if non-compliant	June 2026	Develop procedure





9. Domestic animal businesses

All Domestic Animal Businesses must register with Council and comply with the relevant code of practice. In Victoria (and most Australian states), a Domestic Animal Business (DAB) is a business that involves the breeding, rearing, training, boarding, or sale of dogs and cats, and is regulated under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (Vic).

9.1 Context and current situation

There are 15 registered Domestic Animal Businesses within the City of Whittlesea, comprising:

- Five pet shops
- Six dog training establishments
- Two boarding establishments
- One animal shelter
- One breeding establishment.

Domestic Animal Business Statistics	Number
Registered Domestic Animal Businesses	15
Identified non-registered Domestic Animal Businesses	0
Complaints regarding Domestic Animal Businesses	1
Prosecutions related to Domestic Animal Businesses	0
Notices to comply related to Domestic Animal Businesses	0

Current educational, promotional and compliance activities.

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

9.2 Current Policies and Procedures

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

9.3 Our Plan

Identify and register all Domestic Animal Businesses (DAB) in the municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Identify all businesses that should be registered DAB in the municipality and determine their registration status.	As required	Number of DABS registered (100%)
Investigate all report of unregistered Domestic Animal Businesses	As required	Number of reports investigated (100%)

Annually inspect and audit all registered Domestic Animal Businesses

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct annual audits of all Domestic Animal Businesses	Annually	Number of audits conducted (100%)
Where required, act promptly to address matters of non-compliance	As required	Number of reports investigated (100%)
Investigate and act upon public complaints about Domestic Animal Businesses	As required	Number of reports investigated (100%)



10. wat djerring Animal Facility

10.1 Context and current situation

In October 2022, Council took responsibility, for managing the wat djerring Animal Facility (formerly the Epping Animal Welfare Facility) on behalf of Merri-bek, and Darebin Councils. This collaborative approach aims to improve outcomes by reducing euthanasia rates and increasing the reunification of animals with their owners or placement into new homes.

wat djerring (meaning 'we together') provides expert, responsible care to every animal admitted and helps to keep people and pets safe.

The operating model provides greater flexibility for Council to respond to community needs, build stronger partnerships within the animal welfare sector, and lead on shared domestic animal management priorities.

The wat djerring Animal Facility has partnered with 59 rescue groups and welfare organisations who offer adoption opportunities to the community.

The wat djerring Animal Facility provides the following services:

- refuge for stray, abandoned and surrendered animals
- reunite lost pets with their owners
- facilitate adoptions by finding new homes for unowned cats and dogs
- protect animals from cruelty
- promote pet wellbeing
- provide education regarding responsible pet ownership
- provide veterinary care to animals at the facility
- facilitate temporary care of domestic animals owned by residents at risk of, or in a crisis due to family violence or other crisis situations such as people experiencing homelessness.

Community sentiment toward the wat djerring Animal Facility is overwhelmingly positive, particularly in relation to the quality of staff and service. The majority of respondents reported high satisfaction across all key areas, with 83% satisfied or very satisfied with the helpfulness of the staff and 84% with staff professionalism. The timeliness of service was also rated favourably, with 81% expressing satisfaction. Overall satisfaction with the Animal Facility was even higher, at 85%, indicating strong community approval and confidence in the Animal Facility's operation and service delivery.

10.2 Current Policies and Procedures

The wat djerring Animal Facility supports City of Whittlesea partner Councils to meet their responsibilities under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (VIC) and ensuring compliance with the Code of Practice.

10.3 Our Plan

Review the operation of wat djerring to ensure it is achieving best practice

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review rescue and adoption programs provided	Annually	Review completed Number of recommendations developed and implemented Number of animals transferred to rescue groups or adopted
Review surrender waitlist	Annually	Review completed Number of recommendations developed and implemented Number of animals on the waitlist
Undertake targeted adoption and rehoming campaigns, to ensure that wat djerring Animal Facility maintains sufficient capacity	Ongoing	Number of campaigns delivered Engagement statistics Occupancy rates Average length of stay

11. Family Violence and Crisis Support

11.1 Context

Council is committed to providing temporary care of domestic animals owned by residents at risk of, or are experiencing family violence or other forms of crisis, including experiencing homelessness.

Council recognises that for many reasons, domestic animals cannot always be taken with a person into crisis accommodation and/or family violence refuge.

11.2 Objective

To provide a timely response to requests for temporary boarding of domestic animals (cats and dogs) at the wat djerring Animal Facility by liaising with Victoria Police and / or relevant support agencies.

11.3 Implementation

- Temporary care for domestic animals will be provided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with relevant agencies/Victoria Police.
- A case worker from the relevant agency must be nominated to maintain ongoing contact with Council.
- The length of stay for emergency boarders will be for a period of three weeks but may be extended on a case-by-case basis.

11.4 Costs

- Specialist family violence services (or other relevant agency) are requested to cover 50% of the daily welfare boarding fee.
- Microchipping and registration fees will be waived by Council.
- The cost of basic medical care, desexing, and vaccinations will be waived by Council.

11.5 Our Plan

Review Support initiative to ensure it is achieving Council Partners' Objectives		
Activity	When	Evaluation
Review the Domestic Animal Welfare Support initiative	Annually	Review completed

12. Annual review of plan and annual reporting

In line with the Domestic Animals Act 1994, Council must review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and amend the plan as needed. The following activities outline how the Council will meet these requirements.

12.1 Our Plan

Comply with Section 68A(3) of the Domestic Animals Act		
Activity	When	Evaluation
Provide the Secretary of Agriculture Victoria with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan	December 2025 and annually	Copy provided to Secretary
Review the Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan	Annually	Plan reviewed annually
Publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in Council's Annual Report	Annually	Evaluation report published
Develop internal progress reports	Quarterly	Quarterly progress reports
Council will undertake a major review of the plan after four years	2029	Major review to be undertaken



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