

1.7 DRAFT DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2021-25

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. notes the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25 as presented in Attachment One to this report, and*
- 2. releases the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25 for public comment.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present a copy of the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25 (DAM Plan) which has been developed following public consultation to inform the draft plan.

It is recommended that the draft DAM Plan (Attachment One) be released for public comment.

BACKGROUND

Under Section 68A of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 all Councils are required to prepare a DAM Plan at four-yearly intervals.

The purpose of the DAM Plan is to provide Council with a strategic framework that delivers policy direction for animal management in Monash.

The Act specifies that a Council's DAM Plan must include the following:

- a method for evaluating its animal control services;
- an outline of programs for training of authorised animal management officers;
- an outline of intended programs, services and strategies;
- review all existing orders and consider the need for further orders;
- any other matters; and
- periodic evaluation of all programs, services and strategies.

The plan is to be submitted to the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources in December with this being Council's fourth DAM Plan.

DISCUSSION

The development of the plan has involved a review of the current plan and consultation with the community via a survey that could be accessed on the Shape Monash engagement portal.

Internal Review

The 2017-21 plan delivered a range of objectives including a modest increase in the number of registered dogs and cats and the introduction of a night-time curfew for cats. In reviewing the plan it is evident that many activities should be carried over into the next plan and where appropriate these undertakings should be reviewed in terms of 'continuous improvement' to ensure relevancy, efficiency, best practice and efficacy.

The plan set out a range of activities designed to ensure that dogs and cats are registered with Council. These activities included SMS registration reminders, annual door-knock registration checks, and reconciling microchip data with Council records. Prior to adopting the plan in 2017, registration numbers were declining however during the life of the plan registration numbers increased by 3%.

In April this year, a night-time curfew for cats was introduced following further community consultation and engagement with cat owners.. Other activities under the DAM Plan included:

- Providing Information to cat owners about the benefits of keeping cats in at night. This was part of an education program in the lead up to the night time curfew.
- Officers participated in a broad range of training opportunities focusing on enforcement practices and customer service
- Dog poo disposal bins and bag dispensers were installed at new locations
- Designs were stencilled onto footpaths in complaint areas to remind dog owners to clean-up after their dogs
- Animal Management Vehicles were fitted with signage promoting responsible pet ownership.
- Temporary signage was used in in reserves to let people know that park patrols were underway.
- Work commenced on the feasibility of dedicated fenced off-leash areas for dogs.

Community Consultation

A Community Survey was conducted via the Shape Monash portal during May 2021. This survey sought community input on a range of issues, including access to open spaces, animal registration and nuisance cats.

177 residents provided feedback, submitting 186 responses and these are set out in Attachment Two.

The survey results can be categorised into the following themes:

- Education to be provided in a number of languages with this to be provided in hard copy and online
- Requests for fenced 'off leash' areas including those to separate smaller and larger dogs
- Education around dog faeces (including enforcement & more availability of dog poo bags)
- Encouraging animal adoption
- Nuisance animals – both dogs barking and cats trespassing

Draft Plan

The draft plan incorporates feedback received from the community thus far as well as a review and update to the current plan. Beyond these there are two emerging matters that should also be addressed. Firstly a recommended review of existing leash-free areas.

There is on-going community support for dedicated exercise areas for dogs in the form of 'dog parks' and there are increasing pressures and conflicts on recreational spaces, particularly where organised sport is played and where ground improvements including the introduction of synthetic playing surfaces in certain locations. The improvements that have been undertaken and the conflicts that at times occur, suggest a rethink is required as to the appropriateness of these areas being shared spaces for dogs and specialised recreational pursuits, including whether these can be better managed and designed to better coexist.

The second is exploring the cost effectiveness of pound services, and different models and opportunities that may exist. Council has traditionally outsourced its pound services. It has been a cost effective way of providing this service especially in the absence of owning, having ready access to or an easily identifiable location to accommodate such a facility. Of more recent times however, the costs associated with these services have increased significantly over the past seven years. The increase is due to service providers that are primarily animal welfare agencies, applying cost recovery models that see Councils contributing to the costs associated with the end-to-end care of impounded animals (i.e. care from the time an animal is impounded to the time it is either claimed or re-homed). Previously, Councils

were only charged for the costs associated with the first eight days of care being the statutory holding period, as the animal was owned by the agency after this time. Understanding these increased costs, the it is proposed within the plan to review the cost effectiveness of outsourcing pound services and exploring the feasibility of bringing the service 'in-house' on either a local or regional basis.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The proposal to revisit dog off-leash areas will have relevance to the following:

- Monash Open Space Strategy
- Monash Football (Soccer) Plan
- Active Monash Facilities Hierarchy

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A Gender Impact Assessment has commenced on the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan. This has revealed the growing understanding of the link between animal abuse and family violence. Accordingly, the Plan has been amended to include authorised officers receiving training on prevention of family violence and responding to disclosures (section 2.2).

An intersectional approach has also been considered, with one of the key activities of the Plan being to increase publicity and education among Council's non-English speaking residents. In addition, in order to understand any gendered differences in the community's views on the Plan, gender-disaggregated data was collected and will be analysed to inform the final version of the Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Following public consultation, a finalised plan will be presented to a future meeting for Council's consideration. Whilst the majority of plan actions will be met within recurrent budget allocations, some activities such as a review of off-leash areas will require budgetary consideration.

CONCLUSION

The draft DAM Plan has been developed in accordance with the requirements of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

The community has been consulted in the development of the plan and it is recommended that the draft plan be released for one month for public comment. At the conclusion of the consultation process a final plan will developed and presented to Council for adoption.