

Melbourne City Council

Draft Domestic Animal Management Plan

2026-2029

The City of Melbourne respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we govern, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong / Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and honour the unbroken spiritual, cultural and political connection they have maintained to this unique place for more than 2000 generations.

We accept the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart and are committed to walking together to build a better future.

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1. Introduction and Context

1.2 Purpose of domestic animal management plan

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

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

- a. Every council must, in consultation with the Secretary, prepare at four yearly intervals a Domestic Animal Management Plan.
- b. A Domestic Animal Management Plan prepared by a council must:
 - i. set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of this Act and the regulations
 - ii. outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the council's municipal district
 - iii. outline programs, services and strategies which the council intends to pursue in its municipal district to:
 - promote and encourage the responsible ownership and dogs and cats
 - ensure that people comply with the Act, the regulations and any related legislation
 - minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals
 - address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats
 - encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats
 - minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance
 - effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs and to ensure those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and regulations.
 - iv. provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and local laws that relate to the council's municipal district with a view to determining whether any further orders or local laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable
 - v. provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the council's municipal district that it thinks necessary
 - vi. provide for the periodic review of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.
- c. Every council must:

- i. review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan
- ii. provide the Secretary (person who is head of the Department, currently the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)) with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan
- iii. publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

Purpose of this plan

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

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

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

This plan focuses solely on dogs and cats.

1.3 Associated legislation

Domestic Animals Act 1994

The Act provides the foundation for the council's animal management service. The purpose of the Act is to promote animal welfare, the responsible ownership of dogs and cats and the protection of the environment by providing for:

- a scheme to protect the community and the environment from feral and nuisance dogs and cats; and
- a registration and identification scheme for dogs and cats which recognises and promotes responsible ownership; and
- the identification and control of dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs; and
- a registration scheme for domestic animal businesses which promotes the maintenance of standards of those businesses; and
- the regulation of matters relating to the breeding and sale of dogs and cats; and
- the registration of foster carers for certain purposes; and
- matters related to the boarding of dogs and cats; and

- the regulation of the permanent identification of dogs, cats, horses and other animals; and
- payments to the Treasurer from fees received by Councils under this Act; and
- other related matters.

There are six mandatory codes of practices made under the Act which domestic animal businesses are required to comply with. Domestic animal businesses include breeding and rearing establishments, boarding establishments, shelters and pounds, pet shops, dog training establishments and greyhound establishments. The regulation of these codes is managed by Council.

Local Laws and orders

Part 5 of Melbourne City Council's Activities Local Law 2024 (Local Law) is aimed at ensuring that animals that visit or live in the municipality are cared for and managed in a responsible manner. The Local Law requires people to:

- Maintain any structure where an animal is kept in a clean, inoffensive and sanitary condition, so as not to cause any nuisance and to the satisfaction of Council.
- Not feed or leave food for animals in public spaces.
- Carry with them a means to collect and remove their animals' excrement in public places and immediately clean up any waste their animal leaves behind.

Part 5 of the Local Law also states that a person must not keep any more of each species or group of animals than prescribed by the Council. Whilst this is written in the Local Law, there are currently no restrictions in place limiting the number of pets a person can keep on their premises.

Melbourne City Council's order under Section 26(2) of the Act (the order) requires dogs to be:

- leashed in public places except for designated off-leash areas
- under effective voice or hand control when off-leash in designated areas, as well as being able to be brought under the effective control of a leash if required
- leashed when within 20 metres of:
 - a children's playground area
 - an outdoor fitness equipment area
 - a sports field or recreation facility during organised sporting activity (including training)
 - the principal location of an organised public event or meeting
 - a river and creek or waterbody
- leashed within five metres of a shared path (designated and identified for use by both pedestrians and bike riders)
- prohibited from entering designated 'dogs prohibited' areas.

The following parks currently have designated off-leash areas:

- Canning And Neill Street Reserve, Carlton (timed off-leash area)
- Clayton Reserve, North Melbourne
- Fawkner Park, South Yarra
- JJ Holland Park, Kensington
- Kings Way and Moray Street Reserve, Southbank
- Manningham Reserve, Parkville
- North Melbourne Recreation Reserve, North Melbourne
- Point Park, Docklands (timed off-leash area)
- Princes Park, Parkville
- Riverside Park, Kensington (timed off-leash area)
- Ron Barassi Senior Park, Docklands
- Royal Park, Parkville
- Stawell Street Park, West Melbourne
- Wellington Park, East Melbourne (timed off-leash area)
- Yarra Park, East Melbourne

Note, timed access means between the hours of 6pm to 8am between 1 November and 31 March and 5pm to 9am between 1 April to 31 October.

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

1.4 Process applied in developing the plan

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

TABLE 1: INVESTIGATIONS UNDERTAKEN IN PREPARING THE PLAN	
Legislation, regulations, codes of practice	The <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> is the foundation for Council's animal management service. Developing this plan is an opportunity to review the City of Melbourne's animal management service to improve the outcomes achieved. The legislation is described on pages 4 to 6 of this plan.
Local laws and orders	The Council's local laws and the order relating to animals are described on pages 4 to 6 of this plan. The plan is required to provide for their review.
Animal management data	The City of Melbourne's pet registration and customer request data was reviewed to identify trends, issues and possible priorities, which is referenced throughout this plan.
Existing services	Preparing the plan is an opportunity to reflect on the existing animal management services provided by the Council and consider possible improvements. The existing animal management service is referenced throughout this plan.

City of Melbourne profile	An understanding of the community profile will ensure the plan reflects the special attributes of the municipality. This is described in section 1.6 of this plan.
Community and stakeholder feedback	Community and stakeholder views were a core element in preparing the plan. Extensive feedback obtained has been incorporated into the plan where possible and appropriate. The community engagement process and feedback received is explained in detail below.
The planning context	The City of Melbourne reviewed relevant plans and strategies and their implications for this plan. This includes: • Future Melbourne 2026 • Asset Plan 2021 – 2031 • Open Space Strategy 2012 • Master Plans for City of Melbourne’s major parks and gardens
Research and best practice	The City of Melbourne reviewed the latest research and best practice in animal management.
Funding	This plan has been prepared assuming that all initiatives will be funded within existing budgets.
Staff feedback	City of Melbourne staff were able to provide valuable input on trends, issues and possible priorities and initiatives. Input was obtained from: • Animal Management Team • Parks and City Greening Branch (including Park Rangers and Open Space Planning) • Local Laws Team • Community Development Branch (including the Neighbourhood Partner Team) • Legal Services • Customer Relations • Community Wellbeing (including ageing and inclusion and Health Services) • Waste and Recycling Branch
Partnerships	In preparing the plan, the City of Melbourne considered ways to partner with others to improve outcomes and achieve a better use of resources. Existing and future possible partners include the State Government, neighbouring councils, the Council’s contracted animal pound service, other animal welfare organisations, veterinarians, microchip implanters, domestic animal businesses, obedience clubs and animal trainers.

1.5 Feedback

In April 2025 the City of Melbourne went to the community to gather feedback for the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026– 2029. This involved an online survey on the Participate Melbourne website, with a discussion paper (which informed the discussion) for the community's consideration and comments.

The community engagement opportunity was promoted through a range of digital channels that targeted pet owners and non-pet owners. This included social media and an email to all registered pet owners.

The City of Melbourne received 973 contributions to this engagement, which was a substantial increase on the 465 contributions received during the preparation of the previous plan in 2022. This is a clear indication and a reflection of the substantial increase in pet ownership and awareness and demand of the animal management service. This also reflects how the City of Melbourne has been engaging in recent years. Of the 973 contributions, 89 per cent of people lived within the City of Melbourne, 65 per cent were dog owners, 28 per cent were cat owners and 58 per cent of all contributors used local parks, reserves and playgrounds.

Respondents were asked a series of questions to help identify how they relate to the topic, things they had observed around pet ownership in the municipality and what strategies they believe to be effective to manage the impacts of domestic animals. They were also asked to outline what matters they believe should be the priorities for City of Melbourne for this plan. Key information obtained from the survey is as follows:

- 30 per cent of respondents stated they very often or always observe dogs off-leash where they shouldn't be. 36 per cent of people advised they only sometimes observed dogs off-leash where they shouldn't be, and 33 per cent advised that they either rarely or never observed this issue.
- 31 per cent of respondents stated they very often or always observed dog waste not being picked up.
- The majority of respondents indicated that their experiences with dogs in public places were largely positive; they reported that they rarely or never observed issues around owners being too far from/not watching their dogs, dogs annoying or intimidating people/other dogs or dogs attacking/chasing wildlife.
- When asked to select their top priority, knowledge of rules and responsibilities for owning pets was the highest priority (19 per cent of respondents selected this), closely followed by dog leashing rules (18 per cent).
- Respondents indicated that whilst they were familiar with most municipal rules around pet ownership, there were some rules that they were not aware of. 20 per cent of respondents reported that they were not aware that their pet needed to be wearing their council issued registration tag when outside of the owner's property. 36 per cent of owners indicated that they were leashed when within 20 metres of a children's playground, a sports field or recreation facility during organized sporting activity or a river and creek or waterbody.

- Even though respondents indicated pet ownership rules and responsibilities should be an important focus of the plan, 43 per cent said that they were unsure if education sessions on municipal rules would be an effective strategy for ensuring dogs are kept on a leash in public places.
- 80 per cent of respondents stated that providing fenced off leash areas is either an effective or highly effective strategy for keeping dog on a leash in public places.

Key themes arising from the qualitative feedback were:

- The community reaffirmed their support for the introduction of cat curfews within the municipality. The community expressed that this was essential for the welfare of cats and to minimise the predation of wildlife.
- Respondents indicated that they wanted to see more education and information provided about the benefits of a cat curfew and mandatory desexing, supports to comply with the new rules and how they will be enforced.
- There was a large amount of feedback from pet owners concerning community access with their pets; respondents would like to be able to better incorporate their pets into their day to day lives and would like to be able to take their pets on public transport and to more restaurants, bars and cafes.
- Respondents also provided feedback around the importance of implementing a strategy to manage semi-owned and unowned cat populations.
- Respondents indicated that they wanted to see more off leash areas introduced within the municipality, with an emphasis on these areas being fenced. Respondents stated that fenced areas clearly delineate spaces for dog owners and other park users and believe this will result in greater compliance with leashing requirements
- Respondents indicated that more bins with dog waste bags will assist with reducing the amount of dog waste left in the municipality.
- Respondents indicated that the issues caused by dogs being off leash outside of designated areas persist, and that they would like to see more visible enforcement of the rules during peak times to boost compliance.
- The community indicated that a review of the infrastructure in parks is important, and that they would like to see an improvement in signage, shelter, lighting and dog play equipment

This feedback was considered when preparing the draft plan.

1.6 Demographic and profile of the City of Melbourne

In 2024, the estimated resident population is 189,381. The estimated population resides in approximately 104,000 dwellings. It is estimated that by 2043 the population could reach 292,000, seeing a further 37,000 new dwellings.

Some highlights of our resident population includes:

- Median age is 30 years old

- 9% are couples with children (compared to 33% in Greater Melbourne)
- 40% are lone person households (compared to 24% in Greater Melbourne)
- 98% live in medium and high-density housing (compared to 34% in Greater Melbourne)
- 63% are renting (compared to 29% in Greater Melbourne)
- 55% were born overseas (compared to 36% in Greater Melbourne)
- 46% speak a language other than English at home (compared to 34% in Greater Melbourne)
- 39% worked at home (compared to 29% in Greater Melbourne)
- 19% attend university (compared to 6% in Greater Melbourne)

The most recent data obtained from the By-Name List, a list that services record names of people experiencing homelessness, shows there are currently approximately 170 people experiencing homelessness with approximately 85 people sleeping rough on the streets in our municipality, some of whom own pets.

As a capital city municipality, there is the added dimension of the daily influx of visitors and workers. There are a significant amount of people including residents, workers, students and visitors who access the city every day for work, rest, leisure or play. Some of the visitors are dog walkers or owners from neighbouring municipalities.

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

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

2. Plans

2.1 Training for authorised officers

The Animal Management Team (the team) is led by the Animal Management Coordinator, who is supported by a senior animal management officer and four animal management officers. A business support officer provides some administrative support to the team. There is currently no plan to expand this team. The team delivers services including proactive patrols of parks and open spaces, complaint resolution, collection of stray animals and dog attack investigations.

Animal pound services and after-hours emergency collection services are both provided by The Lost Dogs Home under contract until 30 June 2026.

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

All authorised animal management officers must meet the requirements of their position descriptions. All officers undergo an induction program, are educated on the relevant standard operating procedures and receive training on professional and technical skills.

All animal management officers undergo the following training:

- conflict resolution training
- customer service training
- Investigative and legal skills and knowledge
- animal breed identification, behaviour awareness and handling
- restricted breed dog identification
- regular standard operating procedure and policy training
- lead audit training (only for senior officer and coordinator).

Our plan

Objective 1

Ensure the team is suitably resourced and skilled

Activity	When	Evaluation
Ensure officers undergo training to improve capability and to ensure they are equipped to meet the needs of the community.	Annually	Completion of annual goals and performance appraisals. Mandatory training is documented in position descriptions or relevant standard operation procedures. All staff undergo required training
Ensure all officers attend industry training and seminars.	Ongoing	Completion of State Government provided training. Attendance at the annual Australian Institute of Animal Management conference
Develop a job share program within the City of Melbourne aimed at enhancing collaboration with other work areas and upskilling staff.	2026	Job share program developed and implemented
Work with RSPCA Victoria to upskill our staff to manage cruelty related matters to provide a collaborative, timely and effective response to reports of cruelty within the City of Melbourne	2027	MOU agreed to and implemented

2.2 Registration and identification

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

City of Melbourne's current data

The number of registrations for the last five years is displayed below. There has been a 35 per cent increase in total dog and cat registrations in the City of Melbourne since 2020.

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

The recent community engagement for this plan identified that out of 928 respondents, around 70 per cent had one cat or dog within their household and around 25% per cent owned two cats or dogs .

Table 1 – Pet registration statistics

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

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Dogs	2377	3084	3042	3232	3784
Cats	3618	4474	4123	3907	4280
Total	5995	7558	7165	7139	8064

City of Melbourne's current requirements, initiatives and procedures

These include:

- Reduced registration fees for pet owners who are concession/benefit card holders.
- Reduced fees are also available for categories of dogs and cats including those that are desexed, over 10 years old, and/or obedience trained (in compliance with the regulations).
- Reduced fees available to owners who provide advice from their vet that their pet is too young to be desexed but is booked in to have the procedure done.
- Different payment options for renewing the registration of pets, removing barriers for pet owners to renew their pet's registration

- Annual follow-up of registration renewals with a late fee being applied to incentivise timely payment of fees, aiming to increase voluntary compliance and reduce enforcement action.
- Pro-rata reduction in fees as the registration year progresses, including the last two months of the registration period free for new registrations.

City of Melbourne's current compliance activities

These include:

- Follow up of unpaid registration renewals including email/text message campaigns, phone calls, property visits, the application of a late fee and infringement notices.
- Targeted door knocks and patrols to identify unregistered pets.
- Patrols of parks and public places to ensure dogs are registered.
- Follow-up on registration compliance when we receive mandatory notifications from shelters or breeders about the sale of an animal to a person who resides within the municipality.

Our plan

Objective 1

Increase the number of pet registrations and improve owner's experiences in registering pets

Activity	When	Evaluation
Introduce a program that uses data obtained from microchip registries relating to animals within our municipality to identify animals not recorded City of Melbourne's pet registration database, and to follow up on any unregistered animals.	2028	Demonstrated increase in the numbers of pets registered with the City of Melbourne following microchip registry cross referencing exercise.
Review the process and systems used to deliver the annual pet registration renewal process and implement improvements.	2027	Number of pet registration renewals paid on time Reduced number of enquiries from pet owners requiring assistance with their renewal. Time taken to complete annual registration renewal process
Improve awareness of pet registration and responsible pet ownership by making communication materials available in veterinary clinics, domestic animal	2026	Communication material created and displayed in locations

businesses and high-density residential buildings.		
Conduct targeted campaigns and registration drives in areas with low registration numbers.	2027	Number of new registrations received

Objective 2

Improve awareness of the benefits of pet registration

Activity	When	Evaluation
Update the promote City of Melbourne's responsible pet ownership quiz to improve awareness and benefits of registration and pet ownership requirements.	2026	Review and update complete
Utilise social media and other media channels to promote the benefits of pet registration and responsible pet ownership.	Annual	Increase in the number of social media posts or other media content

2.3 Nuisance

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

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

We continue to see higher numbers of reports that relate to animals creating a nuisance, in particular barking dogs and leashing of dog issues. We believe this can be attributed to more people being home more often, providing opportunity for them to hear dogs bark and an increase in dog ownership in high density areas. There is an ongoing competing demand for use of public spaces, whereby dogs interfere or cause concern with people in parks and public places. Community feedback tells us there is still work to be done to strike the balance in how public spaces are utilised, in particular, when and where dogs are allowed to be off-leash.

The City of Melbourne recognises the need to balance the use of public places, however for the benefit and safety of all users of public places does not tolerate non-compliance of the requirements to appropriately control dogs.

Barking dog reports have been at an all-time high, increasing from 142 in 2020, to 196 in 2024. Reports relating to leashing of dogs in public places (dogs not on-leash where they are supposed to be) have remained stable following a dramatic increase in reports in 2020.

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

These include:

- The order sets out the requirements for dogs in public places, including:
 - a requirement that dogs be leashed at all times except when in designated off-leash areas.
 - A requirement for dogs to be leashed when within 20 metres of a children's playground, public barbecues, outdoor fitness equipment, sports fields during organized sporting activity, public events and rivers, creeks and waterbodies.
 - prohibiting dogs from entering certain areas.
- The Local Law requires dog owners to collect and correctly dispose of their dog's excrement and to carry a plastic bag or pooper scooper with them for the immediate collection and removal of dog excrement when in a public place.
- The City of Melbourne provides information on their website about preventing nuisance barking, cats becoming a nuisance and the requirements to remove your dog's excrement.
- The City of Melbourne provides 65 dog bag dispensers throughout the municipality. The cost of bags and maintaining the dispensers is approximately per annum. Most dispensers need filling daily or every second day and the dispensers are frequently damaged through high use.

The City of Melbourne has a number of unowned or semi-owned cat colonies. The cats in these colonies contribute to wildlife predation, cause nuisance for nearby residents and businesses and contribute to the spread of zoonotic diseases or illnesses. Some programs have been undertaken to reduce or remove these colonies; however these have been ineffective.

City of Melbourne consulted the community concerning cat management in July and August 2024. The majority of the community was supportive of cat containment measures such as night-time curfews (85 per cent support), prohibitions in environmentally sensitive areas (81 per cent support) and mandatory desexing of cats (84 per cent).

Given these strong levels of support, on 1 April 2025 Council resolved to make municipal orders to require all cats to be:

- contained to their property between the hours of 6pm and 8am
- Desexed
- prohibited from waterways, riverine environments and certain major parks and gardens, unless under effective control by means of a purpose-built carrier, or harness and leash, and in the presence of their owner at all times.

These orders will come into effect on 1 October 2025 and be reviewed in mid-2026.

City of Melbourne's current compliance activities

These include:

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

Our plan

Objective 1

Minimise the nuisance caused by dogs barking

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and update the information the City of Melbourne provides about preventing excessive barking and how to deal with barking dog complaints.	2026	Review undertaken and information updated as appropriate
Review processes and technology available for dealing with excessive barking to enhance effectiveness of managing barking dog issues	2027	Review undertaken and improvements implemented where applicable Improved evidence and customer ease throughout the process
Develop and implement an education program targeted at high density living to improve dogs' quality of life and reducing issues associated with dogs in high density areas.	2026	Program developed and implemented

Objective 2

Minimise the impact caused by cats and dogs on the environment and community

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct a review of dog off leash areas and rules relating to dogs in public places	2026	Review completed and presented to the Future Melbourne Committee
Implement findings of the review of dog off leash areas	2027	Findings implemented
Review signs and other infrastructure in parks and implement findings from the review	2026	Review completed and findings implemented
Review the management of dog waste in public places, including condition and availability of relevant infrastructure	2027	Review completed
Investigate and implement programs to manage unowned and semi-owned cats in the municipality to improve ownership of them or reduce numbers of unowned cat colonies	2026-2028	Investigation completed and program implemented
Review effectiveness of the orders relating to containment, control and mandatory desexing of cats	2026	Review completed and presented to the Future Melbourne Committee
Deliver a communication and education campaign to increase awareness of City of Melbourne's cat containment and mandatory desexing laws to improve compliance	2026	Information and material published on the website and communicated through social media and other mechanisms
Investigate the introduction of a prescription limiting the number of animals that can be kept	2028	Investigation completed and findings implemented

2.4 Dog attacks

Thankfully there has been a decrease in the number of reported dog attacks, following a spike between 2021-2023. Reported dog attacks were at an all-time high in 2023, with 141 reports – this decreased to 107 reports in 2024. Nevertheless, any report of a dog attack in our community is concerning and involves a victim.

Dog attacks sadly and significantly impact the lives of all people involved. Victims suffer physical and emotional trauma and are often left with significant financial expenses as a result of hospital or vet bills. Dog attacks also seriously impact the lives of dogs – many victim dogs suffer lifelong trauma following an incident. When dogs attack, council can put in place restrictions on how the

animal is managed by declaring a dog to be menacing or dangerous. In serious cases, the attacking dog may be ordered to be euthanised by the Court or council.

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

Within the City of Melbourne, most dog attacks and rushes occurred while the owner was with their dog. This demonstrates that some dog attacks can be prevented through appropriate care and control.

Key initiatives to reduce the risk of dog attacks include; the desexing of dogs, early socialisation and training, ensuring animals are not permitted to wander at large, educating the community (particularly children) about bite avoidance and how to behave around dogs and enforcing the requirements with respect to dogs in public places.

Many organisations and veterinarians provide puppy pre-school classes for owners of puppies. These classes help to socialise puppies around other humans and dogs and educate owners on the ongoing training requirements for their newly acquired puppy.

The State Government body Animal Welfare Victoria delivers several programs targetted at improving safety around dogs including (Victoria wide):

- The Living Safely With Dogs program for kindergartens and the Responsible Pet Ownership Program for primary school visit over 2,000 kindergartens 800 primary schools every year.
- The We are Family Program educates expectant parents and parents of children 0-4 years old on pet safety around young children. It is delivered through antenatal centres in 70 hospitals and 680 maternal and child health centres each year.
- Pet Town is an interactive learning tool educating kindergarten and primary school aged children on responsible pet ownership and dog safety.

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

These include:

- An order requiring dogs to be, among other things, on a leash in all public places except for designated off leash areas.
- Promotion of responsible pet ownership including the benefits of desexing, socialisation and training of dogs on the City of Melbourne's website.
- Information about the dangers, implications and ways to report dog attacks on the City of Melbourne's website.
- Communication with dog owners during parks patrols to ensure the appropriate control of dogs in public places.
- Free dog training events with professional dog behaviour trainers.

City of Melbourne's current compliance activities

These include:

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

Our plan

Objective 1

Improve the effectiveness and efficiency in response to dog attacks

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and update information provided to customers reporting dog attacks to improve customer experience and data collection	2026	Review completed and improvements implemented
Develop information packs for owners of attacking dogs and victims of incidents.	2027	Information pack produced and distributed to stakeholders and used where required
Advocate to the Victorian Government to explore the production of a statewide dog attack database improve the effective management of dogs	2027	Advocacy commenced and responses received
Review, update and improve data gathered on circumstances of dog attacks to better understand drivers of incidents	2028	Review completed and improvements implemented

Objective 2

Minimise the risk of dog attacks in public places

Activity	When	Evaluation
Improved program to patrol public places ensuring the appropriate control of dogs	2026	Program reviewed and evaluation implemented Number of hours patrolled Number of non-compliances observed
Explore the use of data relating to dog attacks to better understand the drivers of incidents and to proactively reduce their occurrence	2027	Review and report on data concerning dog attacks.
Promote education programs concerning safety around dogs, including programs delivered by Animal Welfare Victoria.	2026	Programs promoted and delivered to community groups

2.5 Dangerous and restricted breeds

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

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

The City of Melbourne has received requests and information about owners wanting to move declared dogs into the municipality. When discussing this with the owner, it has been realised that compliance with the requirements has been very difficult for owners given their short-term leases and property types not being conducive to owning a dangerous or restricted breed dog, for example: the placement of an enclosure on a property is hard to achieve.

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

All Council's must follow specific requirements and procedures set out in the Act when dealing with dangerous, menacing, or restricted breed dogs.

Our plan

Objective 1

Identify any declared dogs in the municipality.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and improve system for identifying and auditing declared dogs kept in the municipality	Annual	Review undertaken and improvements implemented Any declared dogs identified are registered in accordance with requirements of the Act.
Explore establishing an information sharing program with neighbouring councils for greater awareness of declared dogs kept near municipal boundaries.	2027	Engagement with neighbouring councils.
Advocate to State Government seeking review of legislation around declared dogs, seeking that councils are given more tools to manage dogs who have attacked	2027	Advocacy commenced and responses received

2.6 Over-population and high euthanasia

The number of dogs impounded in the City of Melbourne has reduced, from 174 in 2020 to 114 in 2024, this is attributable to working with veterinary clinics and other Council's to ensure dogs are collected and seized by the Council in which they were found. The number of cats impounded in the City of Melbourne has slightly increased from 340 in 2020 to 369 in 2024, this is largely attributable to increased trapping activity aimed at semi-owned and unowned cat populations.

Section 84D of the Act provides that an animal must be delivered up to the council of the municipal district in which it was found. The City of Melbourne received fewer animals found in other Council areas but still receives some animals due to the high-profile nature and extended hours of veterinary clinics within our municipality. Not only is there a cost associated with the impound of an animal, ensuring it is impounded to the correct pound with the appropriate information will assist the owner in finding the animal and being reunited with it.

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

- overpopulation of dogs and cats
- animals being relinquished or abandoned
- inability to reunite some animals with their owner because of inadequate identification, including inaccurate microchip details

- the presence of semi-owned or unowned cat colonies in the municipality.

The City of Melbourne is aware of several unowned and feral cat colonies in the municipality that are unwittingly exacerbated by residents who regularly feed these cats, making them difficult to control. There is significant work that needs to occur to ensure the population of these cats are managed to reduce their impact on the environment and the community.

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

- registration and microchipping to increase the number of lost animals that are reunited with their owner
- a collar or tag with the owners contact information on it
- desexing of animals, including mandatory desexing of cats to reduce pet overpopulation
- containment of animals to reduce the number of animals that are lost
- education in appropriate pet selection to reduce relinquishment and abandonment of pets
- education of prospective pet owners to consider choosing an animal from a shelter
- proactive trapping of cat colonies in the municipality.

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

These include:

- Since 1 July 2023 the City of Melbourne's pound service for dogs and cats has been provided under contract by The Lost Dogs' Home in North Melbourne. The Lost Dogs' Home seeks homes for as many lost and unwanted animals as possible.
- The animal management team returning registered lost and stray animals directly home to avoid them going to the pound.
- Educating and working with veterinary clinics within the City of Melbourne for them not to accept animals found outside of the City of Melbourne.
- If animals are found outside of the City of Melbourne and delivered to a veterinary clinic within the municipality, returning the animal to the council of the municipal district in which it was found.
- The City of Melbourne's website provides information on locating lost animals and what people should do if they have found a lost animal.
- Ensuring pet shops and animal shelters have sufficient information to give to new pet owners about responsible pet ownership.
- Desexing vouchers are available for pet owners with a benefits or concession card (33 per cent discount).
- Free dog training events with a professional dog behaviour trainers in the hope of reducing the relinquishment of animals due to behavioural issues.

Melbourne City Council's Activities Local Law 2024 currently places no restriction on the number of animals that may be kept on a property.

From 1 October 2025, City of Melbourne will require all registered cats to be desexed and to be confined to their owner's premises between the hours of 6pm and 8am. In addition, cats will be required to be under appropriate control when in designated areas within the municipality (see 2.3 - Nuisance).

City of Melbourne's current compliance activities

These include:

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

Our plan

Objective 1

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

Activity	When	Evaluation
Continue to return registered animals to their owner if collected as stray or lost.	Ongoing	Increase in the number of animals returned to their owner without having to go to the pound
Continue to work with neighbouring councils and local veterinary clinics to ensure animals are delivered to the council of the municipal district in which they were found.	Ongoing	Number of animals delivered to veterinary clinics that were found outside of the City of Melbourne Number of animals returned to neighbouring councils
Develop and implement a program to improve awareness of the lifelong commitment to pets to attempt to reduce pets being surrendered due to avoidable circumstances	2027	Reduced number of animals surrendered

Objective 2

Increase the number of animals that are reunited or rehomed

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and update the animal pound contract to minimise the number of cats and dogs euthanased that are able to be rehomed to reduce euthanasia of animals able to be rehomed	2026	Strategic service review conducted Outcomes implemented
Review and update all education material on the impacts of cat overpopulation and the benefits of obtaining a pet from an approved animal shelter.	2026	Review completed and information updated
In partnership with shelters, pounds and rescue group, promote adoption and make more available to a broader community	2027	Programs implemented
Review pound statistics to monitor trends in the types of animals admitted to the pound and rates of return, rehoming and euthanasia.	Ongoing	Annual review completed

2.7 Domestic animal businesses

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

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

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

There are currently four registered domestic animal businesses in the City of Melbourne including one animal shelter and pound, one pet shop and two animal boarding establishments.

City of Melbourne's current compliance activities

These include:

- annual scheduled audits of existing domestic animal businesses to ensure compliance with the relevant code of practice
- random audits of existing domestic animal businesses
- response to complaints from the community
- infringements and prosecutions of businesses that fail to comply with the relevant code of practice or works plans issued as a result of detected non-compliance
- searches and enquiries to identify unregistered domestic animal businesses
- promotion of registered domestic animal businesses on the City of Melbourne's website.

Our plan

Objective 1

Identify and register all domestic animal businesses in the municipality

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

Objective 2

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

Activity	When	Evaluation
Investigate and act upon public information about non-compliance.	Ongoing	All reports are promptly investigated
Implement audit schedule of businesses.	Annual	Audits undertaken as required
Review application and renewal processes to improve the experience and ease of payment	2027	Review undertaken

2.8 Other matters

Diversity and inclusion

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

- Over 50 per cent of all City of Melbourne residents were born overseas and 46 per cent of residents speak a language other than English at home.
- The City of Melbourne recognise the value and strength of Aboriginal culture and is committed to their Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan.
- The City of Melbourne supports LGBTIQ+ communities and their allies and recognises their connection to dogs and cats with 16 per cent of all respondents to the community engagement for this plan identifying with this community.
- The City of Melbourne is an organisation that supports families and recognises the need to support victims of family and domestic violence. Further, the City of Melbourne recognises the connection between pets and family and domestic violence and understands they too can become victims or be used as tools to inflict violence.

Our plan

Objective 1

Embrace diversity and inclusion

Activity	When	Evaluation
Define what “responsible pet ownership” means in City of Melbourne and deliver a communications campaign promoting ideal behaviours	2026	Investigation completed Material updated and produced
Investigate the need for information to be published in multi-lingual formats.	2026	Investigation completed Material updated and produced
Review all website, promotional and registration material ensuring it is inclusive.	2027	Investigation completed Material updated and produced
Develop a process and ensure adequate training of officers in dealing with matters relating to family and domestic violence.	2026	Process developed All officers trained to deal with and manage matters relating to family and domestic violence

Emergency management

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

The animal management team play an important role in supporting pets and pet owners during emergency incidents. However, it is vitally important for owners to have plans for their pets during an emergency – this can be both during an emergency incident or in the event of a medical or family emergency, whereby a pet is not able to be appropriately cared for by its owner.

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

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

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

Our plan

Objective 1

Be prepared for an emergency in the City of Melbourne

Activity	When	Evaluation
Collate information and procedures on planning and providing for pets during a range of different emergencies.	2026	Information collated and made available as appropriate
Ensure there is appropriate resources available to respond to an emergency.	2026	Resources reviewed and action taken on identified gaps

Community support services

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

Pets provide companionship and comfort for those experiencing homelessness. However, there are also concerns associated with animal welfare, the risk of dog attacks, pets being left

unattended, access to microchipping and registration and access to essential veterinary care. There are also concerns relating to pets being exploited for the purposes of financial gain with a number of people that enter the city to beg for money owning pets.

The City of Melbourne works closely with homelessness support agencies such as Launch Housing, the Salvation Army and cohealth and provides support, referrals and care when required. The City of Melbourne has a dynamic approach to working with pet owners experiencing homelessness, ensuring both the pet and the owner have the care and support they need to be healthy and to comply with the relevant laws.

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

Through this plan, the City of Melbourne will aim to identify the needs and services required by pet owners experiencing homelessness and will collaborate work with other service providers to ensure we provide an effective response.

Our plan

Objective 1

Identify the needs of pet owners experiencing homelessness

Activity	When	Evaluation
Understand the needs of and services available for pet owners experiencing vulnerability or homelessness.	2026	Review undertaken
Prepare responses to each of the needs including identification of gaps in service provision.	2027	Procedures updated
Develop an information pack for pet owners who are experiencing homelessness.	2026	Information pack produced, given to support agencies and disseminated to pet owners experiencing homelessness

2.9 Annual reporting

Every Council must-

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

Our plan

Objective 1

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

Activity	When	Evaluation
Establish an annual timeline and program for reviewing the plan and evaluating its implementation.	2025	The annual timeline and program for reviewing and where necessary updating the plan is appropriate and will ensure reporting requirements are met
Investigate the production and promotion of the plan.	2025	Plan designed and produced Plan promoted via various platforms
Ensure all programs and procedures are reviewed annually where this is required in the plan.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective
Ensure each activity contained in the plan is evaluated for its relevance to and performance in meeting its applicable objective.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective
If any activities are not undertaken as planned, the review will note why the activity was not undertaken and consider whether it should be omitted from the plan.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective
If any activities did not meet expectations, the review will consider whether they should be omitted from the plan.	Annual	The annual reviews are completed and are effective
Complete an evaluation of the plan. Submit to the Council for approval along with proposed amendments to the plan. Update the plan as appropriate.	Annual	Evaluation completed.
Publish an evaluation of the implementation of the plan in the Council's annual report.	Annual	Evaluation published in the Council's annual report
If the plan is amended, submit a copy to the Secretary.	Annual	Amended plan submitted where required