



**Draft**  
**Domestic Animal Management Plan**  
**2021-2025**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.	Background Information .....	5
1.1.	The Purpose and Context of the DAMP .....	5
1.2.	The Victorian Domestic Animals Act (DAA) .....	5
1.3.	Council Planning Context .....	6
2.	Achievements from the Previous Domestic Animal Management Plan .....	6
3.	Focus of the 2021-2025 Domestic Animal Management Plan .....	6
4.	Pet Ownership Trends and Sentiment .....	7
5.	Our priorities for the Next Four Years .....	8
5.1.	Service Overview and Staff Training .....	8
5.1.1.	Service Objectives.....	8
5.1.2.	Background Information.....	8
5.1.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	9
5.2.	Responsible Pet Ownership .....	9
5.2.1.	Service Objective .....	9
5.2.2.	Background Information.....	9
5.2.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	10
5.3.	Overpopulation and Euthanasia of Pets .....	10
5.3.1.	Service Objectives.....	10
5.3.2.	Background Information.....	10
5.3.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	12
5.4.	Registration and Identification of Pets.....	13
5.4.1.	Service Objective .....	13
5.4.2.	Background Information.....	13
5.4.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	13
5.5.	Nuisance Issues.....	14
5.5.1.	Service Objectives.....	14
5.5.2.	Background Information.....	14
5.5.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	15
5.6.	Dog Bites, and Attacks .....	15
5.6.1.	Service Objectives.....	15
5.6.2.	Background Information.....	15
5.6.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	16
5.7.	Dangerous, Menacing, and Restricted Breed Dogs .....	17
5.7.1.	Service Objectives.....	17
5.7.2.	Background Information.....	17
5.7.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	17
5.8.	Domestic Animal Businesses.....	17
5.8.1.	Service Objective .....	17
5.8.2.	Background Information.....	17
5.8.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings .....	17
5.9.	Control of Dogs in Public Places.....	18
5.9.1.	Service Objective .....	18

5.9.2.	Background Information.....	18
5.9.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings.....	19
5.10.	Open Space Planning .....	19
5.10.1.	Service Objectives.....	19
5.10.2.	Background Information.....	19
5.10.1.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings.....	20
5.11.	Vulnerable Pet Owners and Crisis Management .....	20
5.11.1.	Service Objectives.....	20
5.11.2.	Background Information.....	20
5.11.3.	Actions to Address DAMP Findings.....	22
6.	Implementation and Review of the Domestic Animal Management Plan .....	22
7.	Appendices .....	23
	Appendix 1 – The Domestic Animals Act Requirement of council .....	23
	Appendix 2 – Key statistics.....	24
	Appendix 3 – Operational Information .....	26

GLOSSARY OF TERMS			
Term	Definition for the purpose of This document	Term	Definition for the purpose of this document
AIAM	Australian Institute of Animal Management	Local Laws	Legislation made by council pursuant to the Vic. Local Government Act
AMOs	Animal Management Officers	LDH	Lost Dogs Home
Animal Management Services	AMS	Open Space	Areas including parks, sportsfields, trails, picnic areas etc.
AVA	Australian Veterinary Association	Orders in Council	Legislation made by council pursuant to the DAA
BCC	Brimbank City Council	Pet Survey	Brimbank Pet Survey, 2021
DAA	Domestic Animals Act, 1994	Public place	Includes all streets, roads, footways, reserves, lanes, parks, schools, public halls etc.
Designated off-lead area	Areas where dogs can be exercised off-lead	RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Dog owner	A person in charge of a dog	VLGA	Victorian Local Government Act
LGA	Local Government Area		

### Our Goals

- Strong partnerships between council, and the community, government and business sectors to:
  - achieve best practice outcomes for the management and care of cats and dogs
  - to address service issues and opportunities and optimise outcomes.
- A community:
  - where cat and dog owners understand their responsibilities as pet owners
  - where people and pets live in harmony with each other and the environment
  - that treats cats and dogs humanely.
- An organisation that:
  - is recognised for striving to achieve best practice animal management services and programs
  - understands and responds effectively to changing service needs and demands.

The following expresses the values and principles that guide council's approach to the care and management of cats and dogs:

#### Pet owners and pets

- Council understands the importance of pets and the right of residents to include pets as part of their household
- Pet owners have a responsibility to ensure the health and wellbeing of their pets and to ensure their pets do not adversely impact on the amenity of their neighbourhood and public spaces.

#### Animal Management Services (AMS)

- Our service:
  - has a primary role of ensuring compliance with relevant council and state legislation in order to optimise community safety and amenity
  - is based on industry best practice and is open to service innovation.
- We aim to be recognised for being professional, approachable and responsive.

#### Service planning and provision

- Integrated policy and planning across relevant council departments is key to optimising outcomes for pet owners and their pets, and the wider community
- We recognise:
  - the community has expectations of the service that extend beyond a primary compliance role
  - the need for a flexible and accessible service.

#### Service partnerships

- Council recognises the contribution that community groups and the not-for-profit sector make to the care and wellbeing, and management of pets
- Council cannot address all service challenges alone and will need to partner with community and industry stakeholders to optimise outcomes
- Some service issues are complex and challenging and may involve stakeholders with competing points of view.

## 1. Background Information

### 1.1. The Purpose and Context of the DAMP

The Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) identifies animal management service priorities for the next 4 years, primarily as they relate to cats and dogs. Council recognises that many other types of pets reside with Brimbank families. However, unlike most other pets, cats and dogs can have an impact on neighbourhood environments outside of their place of residence.

The DAMP provides an understanding of current and emerging issues and opportunities, a framework for addressing these, and the legislative context relating to the management of cats and dogs.

The DAMP also identifies the council, community, not-for-profit and private sector partnerships that will be essential to the successful implementation of the DAMP.

### 1.2. The Victorian Domestic Animals Act (DAA)

All Victorian LGAs must review their DAMP annually, and every 4 years must prepare a new DAMP. The Domestic Animals Act<sup>1</sup> requires LGAs to:

- Establish a process:
  - to evaluate service resourcing to a level that enables council to address the requirements of the Act
  - that ensures Animal Management Service (AMS) staff have the training to carry out their roles
  - for reviewing orders and local laws.
- Outline programs, services and strategies that:
  - promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats
  - ensure that pet owners 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
  - ensure owners of dangerous, menacing, and restricted breed dogs comply with requirements for keeping these dogs.

In addition, the Act allows council to address other cat and dog management issues and opportunities as relevant to the municipality.

#### 1.1. The Local Regulatory Context

The DAA establishes owner and local government obligations in relation to the management and keeping of cats and dogs.

The DAA requires cats and dogs to be securely confined to their property. The Act also enables LGAs to create further or more specific regulations relating to the control and confinement of cats and dogs (local laws and orders<sup>2</sup>) in order to maintain a harmonious relationship between pet owners and other residents.

Council's General Local Law (2018)<sup>3</sup> defines the number of cats and dogs that can reside on each type of property (Table 1).

Council has designated 21 sites where dogs are permitted to be off the leash as long as dog owners comply with dog control regulations. Dogs are required<sup>4</sup> to be on a leash in all other public places including:

- in conservation areas
- within 30 metres of play areas
- in the vicinity of BBQ and outdoor eating areas
- during formal sporting events

Animal	Non-farming land	Units, Townhouses, Apartments, Flats	Farming Land
Dogs	2	2	6
Cats	2	2	4

<sup>1</sup> Domestic Animals Act, Section 68A, Victorian State Government

<sup>2</sup> 'Orders' are made in line with the Victorian Domestic Animals Act, 1994 and 'local laws are made in line with the Vic. Local Government Act

<sup>3</sup> Brimbank General Local Law (2018), parts 3 and 6 made in line with the Vic. Local Government Act

<sup>4</sup> An Order created on 24 September 2013 in line with the Domestic Animals Act

- in the vicinity of informal sports or social events
- within 5 metres of a walking or bike path where there may be heavy pedestrian traffic to or from a school.

The DAA also allows council to create specific Orders that stipulate how cats and dogs must be controlled and/or confined.

### **1.3. Council Planning Context**

The Council Plan establishes the overall council planning and policy framework and the goals and objectives that will determine service delivery priorities. The Council Plan contains 4 Strategic Directions that have been determined through consultation with the community, business and not-for-profit sectors. The DAMP, together with other service area plans identifies the issues specific to the service and strategies that address these in line with the Council Plan framework and principles.

Of the 4 Council Plan Strategic Directions the DAMP will play a key role in achieving goals relating to community building/strengthening, liveability and service responsiveness

The DAMP has also incorporated relevant findings and recommendations from other service area plans including the:

- Municipal Public Health Plan
- Community Strengthening Policy
- Age-Friendly City Plan
- Open Space and Playground Plan.

Council recognises the need for a whole-of-council approach to the planning of AMS. This will ensure issues and opportunities relating to pet owners and their pets and the wider community are fully understood and addressed by the relevant service areas.

## **2. Achievements from the Previous Domestic Animal Management Plan**

The highlights from the 2017-2021 DAMP and service achievement from the last 4 years include:

- Subsidised de-sexing initiative and program commenced
- All Officers up to date with existing and new training opportunities
- Renovations and improvements to animal holding facility.

## **3. Focus of the 2021-2025 Domestic Animal Management Plan**

The DAMP recognises that council has to comply with its cat and dog responsibilities as defined in the DAA and ensure residents do the same. However, the plan has identified the need for particular focus over the next 4 years on:

- increasing compliance with cat and dog registration requirements
- initiatives to reduce stray cat populations and associated euthanasia rates
- issues associated with barking dogs, owner control of dogs when in public places, and dogs not confined to their property.

This DAMP recognises the broader community and personal context relating to pets and the matters that need to be better understood. As a result, this DAMP also considers issues and opportunities associated with:

- enhancing the understanding of the changed scope of the service within council and partnerships with relevant departments in order to address common service needs and objectives
- the provision of pound and shelter services
- planning of provision for dogs in public open space
- optimising partnerships with the community to achieve DAMP recommendations
- enhancing communication with CALD communities that often have divergent attitudes and experiences relating to pets, dogs in particular
- support to pet owners in crisis situations.

#### 4. Pet Ownership Trends and Sentiment

Research by Animal Medicines Australia (AMA)<sup>5</sup> in 2019 established that 61% of households in Australia were likely to own a pet. Of these, an average of 40% of households owned at least one dog and 27% at least one cat.

Research undertaken by AMA into the impact of Covid-19<sup>6</sup> on in Australia indicates a significant increase in pet ownership. It is estimated that post-Covid 69% of households own at least one cat and/or dog. Dog ownership has purportedly increased to 47% of households and cat ownership to 30%.

International research<sup>7</sup> indicates similar trends in pet adoptions during Covid-19, with 16% of Gen Z respondents, 13% of millennials and 3% of baby boomers adopting a new pet during the pandemic<sup>8</sup>.

Generally, pet ownership is likely to be higher in families with young children, where people live primarily in free-standing properties, in rural areas, and in younger age groups<sup>9</sup>.

Areas with these demographic profiles are likely to place additional pressure on AMS teams.

In the UK there has been an extreme post Covid-19 surrender of pets<sup>10</sup>. The Scottish SPCA reports a 103% and 151% increase in surrenders for dogs and cats respectively. Similar trends have been reported in the Australian media, however anecdotal

feedback from shelters indicates this has not occurred at the time of the writing of the DAMP.

Table 2 – Pet ownership increases in Australia post Covid-19

	% of households		
	2019	2021	Difference
Dogs	40	47	+7%
Cats	27	30	+3%
Birds	9	14	+5%
Fish	11	13	+2%

Table 3 - What Pet Survey respondents say about their pets

Statement	% of respondents
Pets are an important part of my family	99% (92%)
It is important for me to have an animal in my life	98% (80%)
My pets give me great comfort in times of need	98% (76%)
My pet is important because they give me unconditional affection	97% (65%)
* 'Agree'+'Strongly' Agree' ('strongly agree only' in brackets)	

5 Pets in Australia; A National Survey of Pets and People, p6

6 Pets and the Pandemic a Social Research of Pets and People in the COVID-19 Era

7 [www.lifescienceleader.com/doc/increased-pet-ownership-during-covid-shows-need-for-animal-health-innovations](https://www.lifescienceleader.com/doc/increased-pet-ownership-during-covid-shows-need-for-animal-health-innovations)

8 <https://todaysveterinarybusiness.com/pets-appa-survey-covid/>

9 Pets in Australia; A National Survey of Pets and People, p6

10 Shelters 'at capacity' with unwanted lockdown pets; [www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-56546206](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-56546206)

## 5. Our priorities for the Next Four Years

This section highlights service priorities for the next four years and background information relating to service needs. Service priorities may change over the life of the DAMP, particularly in response to changing community, animal management service, and other council service demands.

### 5.1. Service Overview and Staff Training

#### 5.1.1. Service Objectives

- A professional and well-integrated service team that has the skills, knowledge and capacity to respond to current and changing service needs.
- A service that embraces and encourages best practise and collaborative partnerships.

#### 5.1.2. Background Information

The Animal Management Unit is part of the City Compliance Department and the City Development Directorate.

There are 5 Effective Full Time (EFT) staff dedicated solely to the day-to-day operations of the service including:

- 1 Compliance Co-ordinator who oversees all the compliance functions of council including those relating to the Animal Management unit
- 1 Senior Animal Management Officer (also carries out Ranger duties)
- 3 Rangers (full time) who respond to customer service requests and complaints, patrol the municipality including recreational spaces, and to respond other service and community education activities
- 1 Administrative Support Officer (fulltime)

Survey respondents say:

- Council animal management staff are helpful and courteous (78%)
- Staff care about the welfare of animals (77%)
- Council understands and recognises the importance and value of pets (72%)
- There should be a pound service closer to Brimbank (86%)

Ref: Pet Survey, 2021 (Respondents who 'Agree/Strongly Agree')

The Lost Dogs home located in North Melbourne provides council's pound services. Council has a small animal holding facility for lost cats and dogs from which pets are transferred daily to the Lost Dogs Home.

Animal Management staff endeavour to return lost pets directly to the owner when appropriate arrangements can be made. Feedback provided to council and survey feedback highlights challenges associated with the pound service being located at a distance from the municipality and opening hours that are particularly inconvenient for people who work.

Of survey respondents who have had a need to access the pound service, 55% stated the pound is reasonably accessible and 45% stated it is not. Council acknowledges community feedback relating to the distance and opening hours associated with the current pound service and will review these arrangements over the term of the DAMP.

Training and education requirements of the team are reviewed annually. This ensures staff have the knowledge and expertise to deal with service needs. The compliance function of the service is under increasing pressure in relation to stray cats, complaints about barking dogs, dog attacks and 'rushes'; the control of dogs in public places; park patrols; and ensuring general legislative compliance. This significantly impacts the team's ability to develop and implement proactive initiatives in conjunction with potential project partners.

Similarly, anecdotal information<sup>11</sup> indicates that many LGAs, are struggling with workloads and increasing community expectations of AMS teams particularly in relation to:

- enforcement of dog control orders/poorly controlled dogs in public places
- conflict between dogs off-leash and other open space activities
- dog litter
- a lack of resources to enable AMS to proactively engage with peak organisations and community groups to address priority service issues
- low compliance with registration requirements for cats and dogs.

<sup>11</sup> Research by LMH Consulting 2018, 2021 for the preparation of DAMPs



The DAMP has identified the limited opportunities through which council staff can engage proactively with the community and via a public relations/partnership approach rather than a regulatory approach. This severely restricts opportunities to build strong community partnerships that in turn will expand the impact of council's team.

The DAMP has identified the opportunity for enhanced integration of the service with other council service areas, particularly in relation to pets and safety in the home (e.g. dog bites and attacks), communication with CALD communities (e.g. culture-specific education material and information), planning and provision of off-leash areas, and support for vulnerable pet owners (e.g. domestic violence and the homeless).

AMS is not resourced to address the above community health and wellbeing and social support issues. It is only with this whole-of-council approach that these matters can be addressed.

### 5.1.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Service Overview and Staff Training	Year of Plan
1.	Review staff training/education requirements and industry networking opportunities	Annual
2.	In conjunction with the Lost Dogs Home, consider opportunities to enhance access for residents needing to collect lost/stray dogs	Yr 2
3.	Review animal holding facility and pound service requirements	Yr 3
4.	Review service procedures to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ procedures that need to be reviewed/refined</li> <li>▪ additional procedures that need to be documented</li> </ul>	Annual
5.	Conduct annual briefing of/workshops with other council departments to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ enhance the understanding of the scope and changing nature of AMS service demands</li> <li>▪ strengthen integrated service planning and delivery protocols and relationships.</li> </ul>	Yrs 1 & 3
6.	Prepare a Communication and Community Engagement Plan that considers opportunities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to increase the profile of the Animal Management Service via selected media channels, particularly in relation to partnerships, proactive initiatives in the community and profiling of positive desired pet owner attributes and behaviours</li> <li>▪ increase the channels through which key pet related matters and opportunities are communicated</li> <li>▪ optimise the reach of communications (i.e. broader reach than one-on-one only communications)</li> </ul>	Yr 2

## 5.2. Responsible Pet Ownership

### 5.2.1. Service Objective

- To enhance information available via council outlets that communicates specific requirements relating to pet owner responsibilities.

### 5.2.2. Background Information

Council recognises that responsible pet ownership commences well prior to adopting a pet. This is particularly important when deciding on the type, breed and temperament of the pet most suited to the family and accommodation environment. It also requires:

- a clear understanding of the likely lifetime costs associated with owning a pet including food, medication and veterinary costs, boarding/holiday care
- a commitment to caring for and interacting with the pet on a regular basis

Once a pet is adopted, council expects pet owners will comply with all state government and council requirements so that:

- all cats and dogs are registered and microchipped
- pets are desexed as required
- pets are secured safely within household boundaries
- dogs do not cause a disturbance by inappropriate levels of barking
- dog owners comply with dog on-leash requirements and dog control orders.

All the recommendations in the DAMP are aimed at optimising outcomes relating to the care and management of cats and dogs. However, the DAMP recognises the need for targeted information and engagement in areas where the issues are more complex and significant.

Council acknowledges that the interpretation of the term 'responsible pet owner' can differ significantly across the community, depending on a range of cultural and socio-economic factors<sup>12</sup>. This is particularly apparent among different cultural groups that have varied attitudes relating to the care/management of pets, and in some cases where there is fear because of past experiences with animals, dogs in particular. Consultation for the DAMP identified opportunities for AMS to work with other service areas to enhance information to people from CALD communities.

The AMS team works with a number of community-based groups and peak organisations/associations such as Alley Cats, the National Desexing Network and Multilingual CatEducational<sup>13</sup>. The team aims to expand and optimise engagement with partnership networks over the life of the DAMP.

### 5.2.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Responsible Pet Ownership	Year of Plan
7.	Review all pet owner information available via council's website and determine opportunities to enhance and/or expand information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ in response to service priorities identified in the DAMP</li> <li>▪ to enhance interaction/connection with the pet owning community</li> </ul>	Yr 3
8.	Investigate opportunities to connect with different cultural groups in relation to the care and management of pets. This may include consideration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ presentations by AMS at community forums organised by other council departments</li> <li>▪ breaking down messaging relating to the requirements of 'responsible pet ownership' rather than generic/non-specific information (e.g. dog control, cat confinement)</li> <li>▪ information translated into other languages</li> <li>▪ culturally specific programs.</li> </ul>	Yrs 2-4
9.	Consider opportunities to connect with cat and dog owners via community run events. Involvement may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ free/low-cost microchipping</li> <li>▪ information sessions</li> <li>▪ dog obedience displays.</li> </ul>	Yrs 3/4

## 5.3. Overpopulation and Euthanasia of Pets

### 5.3.1. Service Objectives

- To have in place an ongoing strategy that:
  - minimises the number of pets, in particular cats entering the pound and shelter system
  - involves effective and productive relationships with relevant peak associations, veterinarians, rescue groups/shelters, adjoining LGAs etc.
  - is founded on best practice and scientifically sound strategies
  - effectively engages with target populations.

### 5.3.2. Background Information

Council recognises the animal and human toll associated with excess populations of pets, in particular the high euthanasia rates of cats. Research demonstrates that the issues associated with policy and practices relating to the management of cats is complex and will arouse diverse opinions and sentiment. Remedies often focus on resolving the immediate concern (e.g. removal of a cat colony, trapping of uncontained cats).

<sup>12</sup> The Responsible Dog Owner: The Construction of Responsibility; Anthrozoos: A Multidisciplinary Journal of The Interactions of People & Animals 32(5):631-646; September 2019; C. Westgarth

<sup>13</sup> <https://multilinguacateducational.weebly.com/about.html>

Research<sup>14</sup> has demonstrated that low level culling of cat colonies/populations does not lead to a decrease, but rather an increase in unowned cat numbers. As a result, these methods are unlikely to impact outcomes for wildlife, spread of disease or public and cat health outcomes. To achieve a decrease in unowned cat populations requires an estimated 30-50% of the population to be trapped and culled every 6 months for at least 10 years. This strategy has resourcing and potential public relations implications for council.

Research undertaken in the US reinforces the need for targeted interventions that use GIS tracking of complaints and known populations of stray cats to determine localities/neighbourhoods for targeting and to monitor program effectiveness.<sup>15</sup>

The reduction of stray and semi-owned cat numbers and associated complaints will be a key focus for AMS over the term of the DAMP.

The number of cats impounded has decreased from a high of 2,605 in 2018/19 to 2,120 in 2021. In 2021 the number of cats returned to an owner was 96 or 4.5% of impounded cats. The number of cats rehomed has fluctuated from a low of 200 (15% of impounded cats) in 2019/20 to a high, of 888 (79% of impounded cats in 2021 according to LDH<sup>16</sup> reports.

The number of cats euthanised has decreased between 2018/19 to 2020/21 from 1,578 to 1,118 or 53% of impounded cats. However, this data does not include cats euthanised because of disease or poor temperament.

It cannot be assumed the decrease in cats entering the pound is a true indication of the number cats being surrendered. Over recent years there has been a proliferation of rescue groups through which an increasing number of cats are being surrendered and rehomed.

As a result, volunteer-based rescue groups are financially under resourced and volunteers suffer high burn-out because of the emotional and financial cost associated with fostering animals. Foster groups are generally not funded by LGAs.

It is estimated that 10-20% of people are likely to feed a cat they 'did not own', and that only 20% of these semi-owned cats are likely to be desexed. This compares to owned cats at 80-90% of fully owned cats being desexed.<sup>17</sup> However, in lower socio-economic areas cats only 50% of cats are estimated to be desexed compared to more advantaged areas where 90% are estimated to be desexed.<sup>18</sup>

Percentage of Pet Survey respondents who:

- feed a stray cat or have in the past (26%)
- have adopted a stray cat and had it desexed (31%)
- would like more information about the management of stray cat populations (85%)

Ref: Pet Survey, 2021

Over 20% of Brimbank Pet Survey respondents said they currently feed a stray cat or have in the past, and 76% of respondents stated they would be more likely to take a stray cat to the pound if they knew it would not be euthanised. Eighty-five percent of respondents would like to better understand the strategies to reduce the number of stray cats

A proactive and fully integrated approach to managing 'stray' and 'semi-owned' cat populations can result in the following benefits:

- reduced costs associated with the collection, rehoming and or euthanising of cats
- fewer cat nuisance complaints to council
- a decrease in the number of cats entering pounds, shelters and a decrease euthanasia rates
- fewer stray cats that suffer poor health and from disease
- reduced impact on native wildlife
- reduction in stress suffered by professionals and volunteers associated with euthanising and rehoming of animals<sup>19</sup>

As part of the program to reduce stray cat numbers, council will continue to involve mobile desexing programs, implement low cost desexing initiatives associated with the National Desexing Network

14 Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia, RSPCA, 2018, p44

15 Based on the number complaints, reduction in intakes at shelters/pounds, increase in sterilisation levels of cats and dogs taken in by pounds/shelters etc.

16 Lost Dogs Home

17 Managing Cats Humanely and Scientifically to Reduce Cats, Wildlife Predation and Costs, J. Rand; G2Z Summit

18 [www.alleycat.org/resources/new-scientific-study-finds-vast-majority-of-pet-cats-are-neutered/](http://www.alleycat.org/resources/new-scientific-study-finds-vast-majority-of-pet-cats-are-neutered/)

19 [www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/all-dogs-go-heaven/201310/animal-euthanasia-and-traumatic-stress](http://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/all-dogs-go-heaven/201310/animal-euthanasia-and-traumatic-stress)

and the Community Cat Program<sup>20</sup>. In addition, council will work with relevant professional and community-based organisations to:

- optimise opportunities to address matters associated with the stray and semi-owned cat populations
- encourage a greater participation by local vets in juvenile desexing cat desexing programs
- encourage appropriate community-based desexing initiatives
- encourage people who feed stray cats to take full responsibility for cats they currently care for
- distribute information that helps correct perceptions that cats need to be outside and/or be able to wander.

Research<sup>21</sup> warns against using the term 'feral' when referring to 'stray' and 'semi-owned' cats because it isolates residents who are feeding and caring for stray cats. Most of the cats cared for in this way do not exhibit 'feral' behaviours. As a result, these residents are unlikely to associate the cat they are caring for as 'feral' or identify their care of these cats as problematic.

It is important that the total number of cats impounded be documented, including those classified as 'feral'. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the scope of the issues AMS staff are having to address.

### 5.3.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Overpopulation and Euthanasia of Pets	Year of Plan
10.	Consider promotional/educational information that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ informs the community of the negative animal welfare outcomes associated with feeding semi-owned/stray cats</li> <li>▪ encourage the full ownership/adoption of semi-owned/stray cats.</li> </ul>	Yr 2
11.	Work with LDH to ensure the following information is collected. This will identify areas that can be targeted to address specific issues/needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intake information e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ intake type e.g. ranger pick-up, surrender, finder stray, trapped, involved in incident</li> <li>▪ address where animal came from/was collected from</li> <li>▪ if registered and microchipped at time of intake</li> <li>▪ reasons for surrender</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Outgoing information e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ reclaimed, adopted, transferred to other facility/rescue group</li> <li>▪ if euthanised, the reason</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Yr 1
12.	Continue with initiatives that encourage the desexing of owned cats.	Ongoing
13.	Undertake a review of the existing subsidised Brimbank Desexing Program and associated initiatives including an analysis of current fee charges for cat desexing. Part of this analysis will be examining the success of existing programs and the feasibility and possibility of extending subsidised programs and consideration of providing a free service to the community.	Yr 1
14.	Evaluate the effectiveness of cat curfews during the term of the DAMP 2021-2025 by benchmarking other Councils who have had long term similar controls and also Councils who have recently introduced a cat Curfew within their Municipalities.	Ongoing
15.	Investigate the use of GIS to plot and identify hot spots relating to cat complaints, known colonies, requests for traps, and target strategies (by location) to reduce stray cat numbers to these locations (e.g. neighbourhoods/ industrial and school sites)	Yrs 2
16.	Consider working with other western region LGAs to optimise resources and partnerships that are aimed at minimising populations of semi-owned and stray cat populations with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ shared messaging and educational information, including information in languages other than English (e.g. messaging needs to communicate a balanced perspective in order to optimise engagement with residents)</li> <li>▪ joint desexing initiatives and promotion of the need/benefit of desexing</li> <li>▪ encouragement of juvenile desexing of cats and involvement of veterinarians</li> </ul>	Yr 2

<sup>20</sup> <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-program>

<sup>21</sup> Managing Cats Humanely and Scientifically to Reduce Cats, Wildlife Predation and Costs, J. Rand

	Proposed Actions – Overpopulation and Euthanasia of Pets	Year of Plan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involves peak sector organisations, community-based, research institutions</li> <li>is informed by scientifically based research.</li> </ul>	

## 5.4. Registration and Identification of Pets

### 5.4.1. Service Objective

- Cat and dog registrations that reflect industry estimations of actual likely ownership.

### 5.4.2. Background Information

Council's database has 13,878 dogs and 5,163 cats registered to Brimbank residents. This is an increase of 4,143 or 43% on 2017 registrations for dogs and 1,953 or a 60% increase for cats.

Animal Medicines Australia (AMA) data indicates there is likely to be significantly more dogs and cats residing in Brimbank than are on council's registration database. Prior to Covid-19 AMA<sup>22</sup> estimations put likely dog and cat ownership at 28,826 and 20,269 respectively.

Table 4 – Cat and Dog Registrations				
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Dog registrations	9,735	10,527	8,088	13,878
Likely actual dog ownership (AMA)				28,826
Cat registrations	3,210	3,479	2,913	5,163
Likely actual cat ownership (AMA)				20,269
Ref: AMA estimations of 60% of households owning at least 1 cat or dog with 40% owning at least one dog and 27% at least one cat				

If AMA estimations are applied to estimated 2026 household numbers, then there is likely to be in excess of 32,000 dogs and 22,000 cats residing in Brimbank at that time. If Covid-19 pet ownership rates identified by the AMA are accurate there could be an additional 9% of households in Australia with pets<sup>23</sup>.

Anecdotal and survey feedback indicates that non-compliance with pet registration requirements is an industry wide issue and needs to be addressed as such. This in part explains why most AMS teams do not have capacity to proactively address issues and are increasingly struggling to address compliance obligations.

The funding of targeted doorknocks and random checking of registrations at off-leash areas for a trial period of time will help council identify the likely level of compliance with registration requirements.

Research demonstrates that changing public perceptions and behaviour is complex and strategies traditionally employed by the local government sector (including punitive measures) will not succeed in achieving behaviour change.<sup>24</sup> Given many LGAs report a high level of non-compliance with registration legislation, collaboration via peak associations such as the MAV could be considered.

### 5.4.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Registration and Identification of Pets	Year of Plan
17.	Continue to cross-reference industry micro-chip databases with council's cat and dog registration databases	Ongoing
18.	Conduct targeted door-knock checks for compliance with cat and dog registrations	Yrs 1 & 3
19.	Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>conducting 2-yearly random door knocks to check on cat and dog registrations</li> </ul>	Yrs 2 & 4

22 Based on 1.3 dogs for 40% of households and 1.4 cats for 27% of households, pgs. 6&9; Pets in Australia; Animal Medicines Australia

23 Pets and the Pandemic a Social Research of Pets and People in the COVID-19 Era

24 Changing Behaviour: A Public Policy Perspective; Australian Public Service Commission; Lynelle Briggs, Australian Public Service Commissioner

	Proposed Actions – Registration and Identification of Pets	Year of Plan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>conducting random annual checks of registration at dog off-leash areas and on-leash sites popular with dog owners</li> </ul>	
20.	Map cat and dog ownership on council's GIS system to identify areas of low registration (compared to industry estimations of ownership) and target as part of annual door knock.	Yr 2-4
21.	Advocate to the MAV, regional LGA networks and peak associations to develop and trial a model program aimed at enhancing perceptions and behaviours relating to cat and dog registrations	Yr 4

## 5.5. Nuisance Issues

### 5.5.1. Service Objectives

- To reduce complaints (per household/per head of population), relating to:
  - barking dogs
  - dog litter
  - dogs not contained on their property
  - the control and behaviour of dogs in public places.

### 5.5.2. Background Information

It is important that pet owners understand their obligations relating to the care of their pets, and ensuring that they do not adversely impact on neighbourhood amenity and the peaceful use of public places.

In 2020/21 complaints relating to dogs accounted for 44% of all cat and dog related complaints. This is a 9% decrease on the previous 2 years during which complaints about dogs accounted for 54% of all cat and dog complaints.

However, this decrease has to be understood in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic which has changed the nature of complaints relating to dogs across the local government sector.<sup>25</sup> Some LGAs have reported increases in barking dog complaints during these periods while others report a decrease in these complaints. Similarly with dog attacks and complaints relating to dogs not contained on properties.

For Brimbank, there has been a decrease in complaints relating to dogs not contained to their property, nuisance behaviours and barking dogs during 2020/21 when the impacts of Covid-19 were most significant. Data that indicates a decrease or increase during this period needs to be interpreted cautiously and not necessarily viewed as a result of effective intervention programs.

Pet Survey responses also indicate a decrease in complaints about dogs wandering off their property and barking dogs. However, 22% of respondents stated that barking dogs and 19% dogs wandering were currently issues for them. In addition, 57% of respondents identified dogs barking at them through front fences as problematic.

In the 3 years preceding Covid-19 impacts, the largest number of complaints related to dogs. In particular to nuisance behaviours (38.3% of complaints), wandering dogs (8% of complaints) and barking dogs (6.2% of complaints).

Consistent with survey results from other LGAs, Brimbank survey respondents identify dog litter as their most significant grievance involving dogs. Eighty-six percent of respondents identify this as a current issue and/or an issue in the past. The lack of compliance with dog control orders and a lack of courtesy by dog owners is identified as an issue by nearly 50% of survey respondents.

Research indicates that at least 60%<sup>26</sup> of dog owners do not always pick up their dog's litter and 9% never pick it up. Areas where dogs are off the leash, whether legitimately or not, and lower profile sites such as trails incur more dog litter than do more popular and high-profile sites. There is a significant population of dog owners who do not associate the privilege of being able to walk their dog in a public place with their civic responsibility to pick up dog litter.

<sup>25</sup> Anecdotal and reported information from LGAs, LMH Consulting 2021 DAMP research

<sup>26</sup> Dogs in Parks; Managing the Waste, Nov 2018; R. Dolesh; LMH Pet Surveys, 2018; Dirty Dog Study, Milbemax 2013

This is supported by surveys<sup>27</sup> of dog owners who say they are more likely to pick up their dog's litter if there are other people around, have someone with them.

Research demonstrates that people who walk their dog on a leash are 10%<sup>28</sup> more likely to pick up litter, and the provision of more bins would encourage dog owners to appropriately dispose of litter. A trial research project in the USA concludes that behaviour change in relation to dog litter can only be successfully addressed via:

- community-led strategies that involve school-aged children
- strong partnerships between community agencies and organisations.<sup>29</sup>

Nuisance matters associated with the behaviour and control of dogs in public places is addressed in section 5.9.

Over 56% of complaints received by council in 2020/21 related to cats. This was the first time in the last 4 years that complaints relating to cats exceeded those relating to dogs. Complaints involving cats has fluctuated over the last 4 years from a low of 1,473 in 2017/18 to a high of 2,063 in 2020/21.

The majority of these complaints relate to stray and unowned cats. Therefore any strategies aimed at reducing complaints relating to unowned cats should be:

- part of an overall plan that includes strategies that target the discrete cat populations (e.g. unowned, semi-owned, fully owned and feral cat populations)
- well aligned to strategies to reduce the stray and semi-owned cat populations
- well aligned to increasing rates of desexing of 'owned cats'.

Nuisance issues relating to cats is addressed in section 5.3 (Overpopulation and Euthanasia of Pets).

### 5.5.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Nuisance Matters	Yr of Plan
22.	Review information available via council outlets (web site, services centres, Facebook etc.) that informs owners of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ problematic environments/situations that are likely to trigger excessive barking</li> <li>▪ strategies to address dogs that bark excessively</li> <li>▪ type and availability of assistance/resources (e.g. printed information, local dog behaviourists etc.)</li> </ul>	Yrs 2/3
	Refer also actions in Section 5.3 Over Population and Euthanasia of Pets	

## 5.6. Dog Bites, and Attacks

### 5.6.1. Service Objectives

- To minimise the incidence of dog bites, attacks and rushes as a proportion of the population
- To provide and promote information:
  - that clearly defines the difference between a 'dog rush' and a 'dog attack'
  - promotes safe behaviours around dogs in the home and in public places.

### 5.6.2. Background Information

Council recognises the need to create awareness of safe practices and behaviours around dogs, particularly in and around the home where most dog attacks and bites occur<sup>30</sup>. Children are significantly more likely to incur serious dog bites, because they are more likely to be bitten on the upper body<sup>31</sup>.

Most dog bites and attacks on children are triggered by natural childlike behaviour that can be confronting to dogs (e.g. flaying of arms, squeals, sudden movement) and approaching a dog when it is feeding. Generally,

A dog's tendency to bite/attack is linked to heredity, a lack socialisation and training, poor health, and the behaviour of the victim.

Ref: Dangerous Dogs – A Sensible Solution, AVA

<sup>27</sup> LMH/P4P DAMP surveys, 2018-2021

<sup>28</sup> Final Report: Dog Guardians' Perceptions and Behaviors Related to the Disposal of Pet Waste in City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, A. Blendeman, B. Derrick et al, 2018

<sup>29</sup> Dogs in Parks; Managing the Waste, R. Dolesh, Nov 2018

<sup>30</sup> The Australian Veterinary Association identifies that 73%-81% of dog attacks/bites occur in the home environment

<sup>31</sup> Australian Veterinary Association; Dangerous Dogs – A Sensible Solution

the victim is familiar with the dog (i.e. the family dog or friend's dog) and bites/attacks on children occur when there is no-one supervising the child when around the dog.

The Australian RSPCA, the AVA, highlight the need to focus on strategies where incidents are most likely to occur and on community-based initiatives. Currently most strategies are aimed at the public environment when incidents, particularly serious ones, are most likely to occur in or near the home environment.<sup>32</sup>

In view of these findings, council identifies the need for a primary focus on increasing owner and community understanding of the:

- nature of dogs and the predisposition of any dog to bite or attack given the circumstances
- triggers that might cause a dog to bite or attack
- need to supervise children when around dogs, particularly in the home environment
- importance of not approaching a dog uninvited when in a public place (risk management and curtesy)
- need to train and socialise dogs when they are puppies and again when they are mature
- the need for community-based initiatives.

A significant number of complaints reported by residents as 'dog attacks' are later identified as 'dog rushes' when investigated. However, it is still a reportable and punishable offence if owners do not prevent their dogs from rushing at other people and/or dogs. A dog that is reported for rushing can be declared as a 'menacing dog'.

The prevalence of dog attacks and rushing are likely to be significantly higher than are denoted in council's complaints records because many incidents go unreported.

### 5.6.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Dog Bites and Attacks	Year of Plan
23.	Review the information relating to dog attacks and bites that is currently available via council channels (e.g. website, Facebook, editorials, pre-schools, event days), and how the information is provided/promoted in order to optimise strategies to prevent dog bites and attacks. Consideration can be given to information that targets improved understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ supervision of children when around dogs and how children's behaviour can trigger unwanted reactions by dogs</li> <li>▪ appropriate behaviour/approaches to dogs when in public places</li> <li>▪ dog control Orders.</li> </ul>	Yrs 2-3
24.	Consider the translation of key 'safe behaviours around dogs' (in the home and public environments) messages into relevant languages for parents/carers of children	Yr 2-3
25.	Work with council's Communications & Community support unit's to identify opportunities to enhance communication of key pet safety messages to CALD communities and develop a plan for engagement and communication opportunities.	Yr 1
26.	Encourage pre-schools and schools to participate in the Victorian State government programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pet Town learning tool</li> <li>▪ We Are Family program</li> <li>▪ Kindergarten Program</li> <li>▪ Primary School Program</li> </ul>	Yrs 1-4

32 Australian and NZ Journal of Public Health; The Incidence of Public Sector Hospitalisations Due to Dog Bites in Australia 2001-2013, 16 July 2017



## 5.7. Dangerous, Menacing, and Restricted Breed Dogs

### 5.7.1. Service Objectives

- Increased information highlighting dog behaviour that can result in dogs being 'declared'
- To ensure owners of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs:
  - are aware of their obligations
  - comply with all legislated requirements for the keeping of these animals.

### 5.7.2. Background Information

Council does not have any restricted breed dogs on its registration database and discourages ownership of these dogs in line with Victorian State Government 'breed specific' legislation (BSL) introduced in 2005.

Council can declare a dog as a 'menacing' if the dog has 'rushed' at a person or animal or inflicted a non-serious bite injury to either. Council has the authority to put in place leashing and muzzling measures for dogs that are declared as 'menacing'. If a dog incurs 2 'menacing dog' violations the dog can then be declared as a 'dangerous dog'. In addition, a dog that is trained as a guard dog is automatically declared as a 'dangerous dog'.

Council recognises the need to increase inspections of industrial sites/precincts to ensure compliance with regulations relating to guard dogs.

Any dog has a predisposition to anti-social and menacing dog behaviours depending on environmental, social and temperament triggers. As a result, council reinforces the need for owners to appropriately educate their dogs, be consistent with expectations about behaviour and actively supervise their dog in public places. This minimises the likelihood of a dog attracting menacing and declared dog violations.

### 5.7.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Dangerous, Menacing, and Restricted Breed Dogs	Year of Plan
27.	Continue with program of inspections for industrial areas/precincts for compliance with guard dog registration requirements	Ongoing
	Refer also recommendations in section 5.6 – Dog Bites and Attacks	As per section 5.6

## 5.8. Domestic Animal Businesses

### 5.8.1. Service Objective

- To ensure that all Domestic Animal Businesses (DABs):
  - comply with registration requirements and with relevant Codes of Practice
  - are aware of support resources available through council and Agriculture Victoria.

### 5.8.2. Background Information

All Domestic Animal Businesses must be registered with council, and council is required to inspect DABs annually to ensure they comply with legislation and Codes of Practice.

Council works closely with DABs to assist them to understand their obligations and to offer advice and support

In Brimbank there are 5 Domestic Animal Businesses.

Categories of Domestic Animal Businesses (DABs) that must be registered with council:

- Cat and/or dog breeders. This excludes 'micro breeders' and 'recreational breeders' who are members of a relevant organisation
- Dog training enterprises/facilities
- Pet shops that sell animals
- Animal shelters/adoption facilities
- Animal pounds

### 5.8.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Domestic Animal Businesses	Year of Plan
28.	Carry out a desktop search for DABs that may not be aware of their obligations to register with council and support their registration process	Ongoing
29.	Review information for and about DABs available via council sources to ensure information is current and accessible	Yr 3

## 5.9. Control of Dogs in Public Places

### 5.9.1. Service Objective

- To increase compliance of dog owners with on and off-leash regulations as measured by bi-annual community surveys and random site observations and interventions by AMS staff.

### 5.9.2. Background Information

In line with survey results from other LGAs, Pet Survey respondents express frustration with dogs being off-leash in on-leash areas (71% of survey respondents), and the lack of control dog owners have or are prepared to exert over their dogs (60% of survey respondents). Rude and aggressive dog owners is or has been an issue for over 62% of survey respondents.

Sixty-nine percent of Pet Survey respondents are dog owners. This demonstrates that a significant proportion of dog owners are likely to be as concerned with owner behaviour when approached about their:

- dog's behaviour
- lack of control over their dog or lack of will to control their dog.

Council's Order relating to dog control does not define the term 'effective control' which can be, and often is, interpreted broadly. This leaves expectations open to debate and makes it difficult for AMS staff to enforce the dog control Order. The DAMP recommends that the term 'effective control' be defined more explicitly and includes requirements/expectations pertaining to:

- maximum distance allowable between owner and dog (50 metres recommended)
- dogs being within unobstructed sight of their dog at all times
- the immediacy of a dog's response to recall commands
- not letting dogs annoy other people or dogs
- owners actively monitoring/supervising their dogs.

Complaints referred to council are unlikely to reflect the extent of community frustration in relation to compliance with on-leash and dog control regulations. Anecdotal feedback from surveys<sup>33</sup> establishes a low level of community satisfaction across the local government sector in relation to the monitoring of on-leash regulations. Similarly this research highlights the increasing defensiveness of a significant population of dog owners in relation to dog litter, un-leashed dogs and unwanted approaches by their dogs.

Responsive and responsible dog owners are concerned that this is reflecting poorly on them and may lead to restricted access to open space areas for dog owners who do the right thing.

There has been a proliferation of commentary and discussion on the internet and social media sites in relation to dog control and dog owner behaviour, indicating increasing tension between less responsible dog owners and other members of the public.

Similar to other LGAs council's AMS team does not have the capacity to increase random patrols of on and off-leash areas to:

- monitor for compliance
- deal with the issues through effective and proactive public relations and behaviour change programs.

Research demonstrates there is likely to be in excess of 75-85%<sup>34</sup> of dog owners who have not taken their adult dog to training or obedience classes, and most training of the family dog has only involved one member of the family. This indicates the likely high level of dogs and dog walkers who have not attended formal/professional training and socialisation programs with their adult dog.

Current and/or past issues for residents involving dogs:

- Owners not picking up dog litter (86%)
- Owners letting dogs off the leash in on-leash areas (71%)
- Owners letting their dog annoy other dogs (63%)
- Owners letting their dog annoy other people (56%)
- Rude and aggressive dog owners (62%)

Ref: Pet Survey, 2021 (Respondents who state as a current and/or past issue)

<sup>33</sup> Written comments via LMH Consulting/P4P surveys 2018-2021

<sup>34</sup> 2021-2022 APPA National Pet Owners Survey

Eighty-five percent of Pet Survey respondents believe dogs can be trained to immediate recall if the owner puts in the appropriate time and effort. Even so, 38% state their dog does not immediately respond to their recall commands and 71% state there are occasions when their dog has not responded to their recall commands.<sup>35</sup> Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents are interested in knowing more about dog obedience and education opportunities they can attend.

The AMS team will investigate opportunities to incorporate promotion and educational information available through the Lost Dogs Home and onsite training programs offered through the organisation.

### 5.9.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Control of Dogs in Public Places	Year of Plan
30.	Investigate information and programs available in partnership with the Lost Dogs Home in relation to training and education initiatives offered by the organisation	Yr 3
31.	Investigate opportunities with the Lost Dogs Home and professional dog trainers/educators for a program of low or subsidised dog training/education initiatives	Yr 4
	Refer also recommendations in section 5.2 Responsible Pet Ownership in relation to targeted messaging strategies about dog control requirements	

## 5.10. Open Space Planning

### 5.10.1. Service Objectives

A whole-of-council and integrated approach to the planning and management of relevant public open space to ensure:

- the knowledge, expertise and service delivery requirements of AMS are incorporated and appropriately addressed and planning is undertaken in line with best practice guidelines
- open space planning relating to dog owners and dogs is undertaken with a full understanding of relevant existing service delivery capacity and demands
- to ensure AMS/council has the future capacity to deliver in line with service level expectation
- to ensure the needs of people who do not want to interact with dogs are addressed

### 5.10.2. Background Information

Council's Open Space and Playground Policy and Plan does not currently make reference to provision requirements relating to dog owners/dogs.

It is essential that AMS is involved in the planning for and siting of off-leash areas (unfenced, partially fenced or fully-fenced). This will ensure that off-leash area boundaries are well defined, sites can be effectively monitored for compliance, and adequacy of buffers between dog off-leash and other parkland activities. Research for the DAMP identifies the need to review the boundaries of some off-leash areas and to consider alternative provision options in some areas.

In terms of fenced off-leash areas, involvement by AMS will ensure that risk management strategies to help manage dog behaviour and encourage active supervision by owners are incorporated. A whole-of-council approach will also ensure that ongoing management and maintenance requirements are identified and relevant resources allocated.

There has been a proliferation of fenced off-leash areas designed without the involvement of AMS teams or an understanding of dog and human behaviour in these environments.

Research indicates that requests for the fencing of off-leash areas most commonly come from owners of dogs who cannot/will not control their dogs in line with dog control Orders. Confining poorly controlled/behaved dogs will increase risk management implications associated with these spaces.

Brimbank Pet Survey respondents:

- believe fenced off-leash areas attract poorly controlled/behaved dogs (39%)
- say they have stopped going to fenced off-leash areas because of poorly behaved/controlled dogs (39%). In
- believe owners supervise their dogs better in unfenced as compared to fenced areas (46%)

Ref: Brimbank Pet Survey, 2021

The DAMP acknowledges the challenges associated with competing demands for access to open space for sport and unstructured recreation activities such as walking and family play. Historically,

<sup>35</sup> Brimbank Pet Survey, 2021

the local government sector has not included provision for dogs off-leash in the allocation of space for dogs off-leash.

As a result, provision is often made in and around other parkland activities, often causing conflict because of the lack of separation between off-leash activities and other activities and sensitive environments and lack of owner control. Similarly, there is often conflict between sporting clubs and dog owners at some sites because of dog litter and wear and tear of surfaces.

The DAMP recognises the need to reconsider boundaries of some off-leash areas to better define them for ease of compliance and clarity for dog owners

Dog owners in Brimbank are required to have their dog on a lead other than on the 23 sites where dogs can be leash free as long as the owner can control their dog in line with the dog control Order. Eight sites are in dedicated fenced off-leash areas.

In Brimbank there are:

- 23 sites where dogs can be off the lead as long as they are controlled in line with the dog control Order, of these there are
- 8 fully fenced off-leash areas.

There are also areas where dogs are not permitted either on or off the leash. These include sensitive conservation areas and are signed as such.

A 2020 research project<sup>36</sup> identifies that problematic dog behaviours are a welfare issue for the dogs concerned. It also highlights fear is due to a lack of socialisation with the urban environment and unfamiliar people, and factors such as poor socialisation during puppyhood and infrequent participation in training and other activities. Dogs that show fearful behaviours are also likely to be smaller, female and under 8 years of age.

#### 5.10.1. Actions to Address DAMP Findings

	Proposed Actions – Open Space Planning	Year of Plan
32.	Ensure that the review of the Open Space and Playground Plan includes consideration of provision for dog owners/dogs	Ongoing
33.	Review off-leash sites in terms of ease of identification of boundaries by the community and for compliance monitoring	Yr 2

### 5.11. Vulnerable Pet Owners and Crisis Management

#### 5.11.1. Service Objectives

- Whole-of-organisation service planning that includes investigation and consideration of specific matters relating to pet owners and their pets in times of crisis.

#### 5.11.2. Background Information

Council recognises that gender and/or social inequity has a high correlation with personal wellbeing. Brimbank ranks fourth lowest of the 79 LGAs in Victoria on the SEIFA Index<sup>37</sup> which means there is an extremely high level of disadvantage across the municipality. In addition, residents report a significantly lower level of wellbeing than do Victorians overall<sup>38</sup>.

This socio-economic and health and wellbeing environment has particular implications for vulnerable pet owners, AMS and other council support services than has previously been documented.

AMS staff report a high incidence of animal hoarding and an increase in matters associated with homeless pet owners.

The Australian Health Review<sup>39</sup> reports that mental health disorders are generally associated with incidents of animal hoarding. Because specialist services are rarely involved in cases of animal hoarding mental health assessment of the hoarder is seldom undertaken. As a result, hoarding will commonly recommence after existing animals have been removed.

<sup>36</sup> Inadequate Socialisation, Inactivity, and Urban Living Environment are Associated with Social Fearfulness in Pet Dogs, Nature Research/Scientific Reports, J.i Puurunen, E. Hakanen et al; 2020

<sup>37</sup> SEIFA Index Ranks areas in Australia According to Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage.

<sup>38</sup> Municipal Public Health Plan

<sup>39</sup> Mental Health of Animal Hoarders: A Study of Consecutive Cases in New South Wales; www.publish.csiro.au/AH/AH19103; J. Snowden et al; 2019

Research undertaken by Latrobe University found animals subject to hoarding suffered severe behavioural problems, disease or injury. As a result, most were unable to be rehomed after they were removed from the property.<sup>40</sup>

Reports or complaints relating to animal hoarding are generally made to council or the RSPCA. These organisations are not equipped to deal with the mental health issues that typically underlies these situations.

The Latrobe University report recommends that, as in the USA, multi-disciplinary teams be established for dealing with incidents of animal hoarding. To do otherwise will result in repeat behaviours and poor outcomes for the people and animals involved, including neighbours.

The Brimbank Response to Recovery Strategy reports the city has the highest rate of homelessness in Melbourne's west and has increase by 30% since 2011<sup>41</sup>. According to a UK study<sup>42</sup> between 5% and 24% of homeless people are likely to own pets, primarily dogs.

These animals are often the primary and often exclusive sources of physical, psychological, and social support to their owners, and often instigate contact with the wider community. However, they can also be the reason the owner continues to be homeless because of a lack of pet friendly accommodation. Unlike animals associated with hoarders, pets of the homeless are likely to be cared for similarly to dogs in the wider community.

The document Preventing Violence Together<sup>43</sup> sets out the plan for addressing issues relating to domestic violence in the western region of Melbourne. Research confirms a high correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and domestic violence.<sup>44</sup> This is consistent with trends in Brimbank, which has a high level of disadvantage and the highest incidence of domestic violence in the region.<sup>45</sup>

Pet Survey respondents who have been or are currently concerned about:

- Animals impacted by domestic violence or abuse – 31%
- The welfare or the treatment of an animal in their neighbourhood – 50%

Ref: Brimbank Pet Survey, 2021

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV)<sup>46</sup> reports that only 12% of domestic violence programs can accommodate pets, and 40% of domestic violence victims are unable to escape their abusers because they cannot access accommodation with/for their pets. Accommodation that does provide for pets generally does so on a short-term basis only.

Over 52% of women are likely to delay leaving a domestic violence situation because they fear for the safety of their pets.<sup>47</sup> Council recognises the need to ensure prevention and support plans address the specific needs of pet owners in these situations.

In line with Victorian State Government legislation, LGAs are responsible for facilitating the preparation of Emergency Management Plans. In addition, local government is responsible for defined functions relating to the care and management of animals during and immediately following times of emergency<sup>48</sup>. These responsibilities include:

- the accommodation of lost and displaced animals, including those presenting at relief centres
- provision of food and water
- collection/storing of food and donated goods
- attending to emergency animal welfare needs
- co-ordination of post emergency recovery activities.

Council recognises the need to ensure that the Emergency Animal Management Plan for the municipality addresses the needs of pet and animal owners in times of emergency.

40 Pets Galore: Study into Animal Hoarding; [www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2014/release/pets-galore-study-into-animal-hoarding](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2014/release/pets-galore-study-into-animal-hoarding)

41 Brimbank Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response and Recovery Strategy,

42 Homeless People and Their Dogs: Exploring the Nature and Impact of the Human-Companion Animal Bond; L. Scanlon et al; 2021; [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08927936.2021.1878683](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08927936.2021.1878683)

43 Preventing Violence Together 2030; Western region strategy to prevent violence against women

44 Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia; AIHW, 2018 / Economic Stress and Domestic Violence; Centre for Research on Violence Against Women; Claire M. Renzetti; University of Dayton

45 Municipal Public Health Plan; 112 incidents/10,000 residents (Brimbank) / 102/10,000 residents in Western Region

46 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Pets and Domestic Violence; Every Home A Safe Home

47 Royal Commission into Family Violence Submission: The Link Between Domestic Violence & Animal Abuse, J. Johnson OAM

48 Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan, 2019, section 8.7

**5.11.3. Actions to Address DAMP Findings**

	<b>Proposed Actions – Vulnerable Pet Owners and Crisis Management</b>	<b>Year of Plan</b>
34.	Advocate for a whole-of-council (and external stakeholder networks) approach to addressing matters of animal hoarding to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ensure effective strategies that minimise reoccurrence are put in place</li> <li>▪ ensure involvement by mental health and hoarding specialists</li> <li>▪ identify collaborative partnerships with other LGAs and to optimise efficiencies of scale and impact</li> </ul>	Yr 4
35.	Liaise with relevant council departments to optimise information about pet care support services available in the region for people who are homeless (e.g. via not-for-profit, government agencies)	Yr 4
36.	Identify staff to undertake CRAF (Common Risk Assessment Framework) or similar training (Family Violence)	As per training schedule
37.	Explore regional partnership opportunities to advocate for the needs of pet owners experiencing domestic violence	Yrs 2-3
38.	Facilitate the preparation of an Emergency Animal Management Plan in line with Victorian State Government requirements.	Yrs 1/2

**6. Implementation and Review of the Domestic Animal Management Plan**

In years 1-3 an interim review of the Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) will be undertaken in line with the requirements of the DAA. In four years a full review of the plan will be completed.

Priorities in the DAMP may be amended over the life of the plan depending on:

- new or changing Animal Management service demands and the capacity of the department to address matters over and above compliance requirements
- the capacity of other departments to address relevant issues identified in the plan
- opportunities to partner with community, government, educational and the business sector

## 7. Appendices

### Appendix 1 – The Domestic Animals Act Requirement of council

Under Section 68A of the Domestic Animals Act, every Council must prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan, as follows:

#### 68A Councils to prepare Domestic Animal Management Plans

(1) Every Council must, in consultation with the Secretary (*of the Department of Primary Industries*), prepare at 4-year intervals a *Domestic Animal Management Plan*.

(2) A *Domestic Animal Management Plan* prepared by a Council must:

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

(3) Every Council must—

- (a) review its *Domestic Animal Management Plan* annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan
- (b) provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan
- (c) publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

**Appendix 2 – Key statistics**

	YEAR			
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 DAMP
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>				
Resident Population	204,190			209,442
Number of households	67,009			69,522
<b>DOGS</b>				
Number of registered dogs	9,735	10,527	8,088	13,878
Household penetration based on 40% of h'holds owning 1.3 dogs (AMA)				36,151
Difference btw registrations and likely actual registrations				22,273.4
Number of dangerous dogs				0
Number of desexed registered dogs				
% of registered dogs				
Number of impounded dogs	904	1,015	869	562
Number of impounded dogs returned to owner	421	590	557	348
% of impounded dogs	46.6	58.1	64.1	61.9
Number of dogs rehoused	286	110	64	141
% of impounded dogs	31.6		7.4	25.1
Number of dogs euthanased	124	110	40	44
% of impounded dogs	13.7	10.8	4.6	7.8
	<b>831.0</b>	<b>810.0</b>	<b>661.0</b>	<b>533.0</b>
<b>CATS</b>				
Number of registered cats	3,210	3,479	2,913	5,163
Household penetration based on 27% of h'holds owning 1.4 cats (AMA)				26279
Difference btw registrations and likely actual registrations				21116
Number of desexed registered cats				
% of registered cats				
Number of impounded cats	1660	2605	2269	2,120
Number of impounded cats returned to owner	27	77	59	96
% of impounded cats	1.6	3.0	2.6	4.5
Number of cats rehoused	584	240	200	888
% of impounded cats	57.0	15.2	15.0	79.4
Number of cats euthanased	1025	1578	1330	1118
% of impounded cats	61.7	60.6	58.6	52.7
	<b>1636</b>	<b>1895</b>	<b>1589</b>	<b>2102</b>
<b>Customer Service Requests and Complaints</b>				
Cat nuisance	1473	1822	1692	2063
% of complaints	39.0	45.0	45.6	56.3
Dog – wandering	337	330	264	176
% of complaints	8.9	8.2	7.1	4.8
Dog - nuisance	1558	1489	1368	1172
% of complaints	41.3	36.8	36.9	32.0
Dog attack	104	100	108	117
% of complaints	2.8	2.5	2.9	3.2



	YEAR			
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 DAMP
Dog rush	54	54	61	48
% of complaints	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.3
Dog – barking	248	252	219	90
% of complaints	6.6	6.2	5.9	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3774</b>	<b>4047</b>	<b>3712</b>	<b>3666</b>

## Appendix 3 – Operational Information

### 1. Authorised Officer Training and Qualification Requirements

QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING DEVELOPMENT					
TRAINING OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS	Staff Member				
	1	2	3	5	6
	Sen R1	R2	R3	R4	AM(C)
Cert IV Animal Control/Gov't Reg./ Relevant Industry Experience	X	X	X	X	X
Customer Service Training/ Dealing with Difficult Customers	Bi-annual	Bi-annual	Bi-annual	Bi-annual	Bi-annual
Aggressive Dog Handling Training	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3
Bite Stick Training	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2
Animal Assessment	X	X	X	X	X
Investigation/Prosecution/ Statement Taking Training	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2	R-Yr 2
Common Risk Assess't Framework (CRAF)/ Domestic Violence Training / Mandatory reporting	R-Yr 2/3	R-Yr 2/3	R-Yr 2/3	R-Yr 2/3	R-Yr 2/3
Livestock Training	R-Yr 1	R-Yr 1	R-Yr 1	R-Yr 1	R-Yr 1
Australian Institute of Animal Management-Annual Conference	X				
G2Z Conference	X				
Writing-Reports/ Procedures/General Correspondence	Bi-annual	Bi-annual	Bi-annual	Bi-annual	Bi-annual
Manual handling	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3
Snake identification/recognition	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3	R-Yr 3		
<b>LEGEND: X = Completed; Yr # = Year to be completed (C)/revised (R); C=Co-ordinator; R=Ranger</b>					

### 2. Animal Management Service Procedures

This section provides a summary of service procedures in place and those proposed for drafting or review. Generally these procedures relate to services provided directly by council. In some cases a service is provided by a service contractor (e.g. LDH). In these cases council will work with contractors to ensure that procedures are in line with relevant legislation and codes of practice.

The table identifies when the review cycle, if the procedure is due for review or needs to be developed.

ACTIONS	REVIEW CYCLE	STATUS	KEY STAKEHOLDER
<b>SERVICE MANAGEMENT/TRAINING</b>			
Review of Animal Management staff training requirements in line with changing operational requirements and council's continuous improvement policy	Annual	Current	BCC
Review of job descriptions	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
Difficult/aggressive customers			
Complaint referral/management	Ongoing	To be reviewed	BCC
IT integration		To be reviewed	BCC
Review of council's Emergency Animal Management Plan	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
After hours	Every 2 years	To be developed	BCC
Rangers working in isolation	Every 2 years	To be developed	BCC
Use of management aids e.g. catchpoles	Every 2 years	To be reviewed	BCC

<b>RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP</b>			
Lost animals	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
Animal Welfare complaints		Current	
Community support e.g. domestic violence		To be prepared	
Pets in the Park event	Annual	Current	BCC
Permits e.g. excess animals	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
Patrol/compliance schedules for parks/reserves etc.	Ongoing	Current	BCC
Impounding of animals	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
Animal transport		Current	
'Dogs at large' and issuing of warnings/ infringement notices	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
Issuing of warnings for non-compliance with Dog Control Orders	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
<b>OVERPOPULATION OF CATS &amp; DOGS</b>			
Recording of animals entering pound/(LDH) shelter from BCC area (i.e. surrendered) and reporting against key criteria e.g. rehoming/ transfer/euthanasia	Quarterly	Current	BCC/LDH
Rescue groups – partnership protocols	Every 3 years	To be prepared	BCC
<b>REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION</b>			
New registrations and registration renewals	Annual	Current	BCC
Registration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Renewal notification</li> <li>▪ Registration reminder notification</li> <li>▪ Failure to register infringements</li> </ul>	Annual	Current	BCC
Cross-referencing of microchip databases with registration database	Annual	Current	BCC
<b>NUISANCE ISSUES</b>			
Complaint management/investigation - nuisance issues			
Cat trapping and management	Every 2 years	Current	BCC/LDH
Investigation of complaints relating to 'excess animals'	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
Barking dogs	Annual	Under review	BCC
<b>DOG ATTACKS</b>			
Investigation of dog attacks/dog rushes/menacing dogs etc.	Annual	Current	BCC
Seizing of dogs	Every 2 years	Current	BCC/LDH
Dog attack prosecution investigation	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
Preparation of legal documentation for court proceedings	Every 2 years	Current	BCC
<b>DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS</b>			
Impounding of seized dogs	Annual	Current	BCC
Assessment of all restricted breed, menacing and dangerous dogs and associated properties to ensure compliance with requirements	Annual	Current	BCC
Review of registration and microchip databases to identify unregistered 'restricted breed' dogs	Annual	Current	BCC
Briefing of owners of dogs declared as 'dangerous', 'menacing' and/or are a 'restricted breed' dog	Annual	Current	BCC
<b>DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESSES</b>			
Domestic Animal Businesses e.g. inspections, non-compliance	Annual	Current	BCC
'Backyard' breeders	As required	Current	BCC

<b>PROVISION FOR DOGS OFF-LEAD</b>			
Monitoring of high use and problematic dog off-lead areas for compliance	Annual	Current	BCC

### 3. Education and Promotional Activities

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP</b>	
Promotional campaigns and media highlights	Ongoing
Attendance at council and community events	As opportunities arise
<b>OVERPOPULATION OF PETS</b>	
Information in council Newsletter	Annual
Information to encourage pet owners to desex cats and dogs	Ongoing – council website
<b>REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION</b>	
Registration information on council's website	Ongoing
New resident Pet Ownership Pack delivered to new residents	As required
Information brochure for pet owners on rural properties distributed	Annual
<b>NUISANCE ISSUES</b>	
Barking dogs – Information provided to relevant dog owners	Brochures – ongoing Online - ongoing
Cat confinement - Information provided to relevant cat owners	Brochures – ongoing Online - ongoing
Information on council's web site on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Desexing/benefits of desexing of pets</li> <li>▪ Managing barking dogs</li> <li>▪ Off-lead requirements</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<b>DOG ATTACKS</b>	
Information for pre-schools to ensure parents and children have access to dog behaviour awareness programs and information.	Ongoing
Information on council's website relating to safe/appropriate behaviour of children round pets, and parental monitoring responsibilities, particularly in relation to dogs.	Ongoing
Information provided at 'Pets in the Park' event	Annual
Information available at council offices and council website	Ongoing
Media releases - Information about owner responsibilities relating to the control of dogs in public places	Annual
<b>DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS</b>	
Assessment of all restricted breed, menacing and dangerous dogs and associated properties to ensure compliance with requirements	Annual
Review of registration to identify possible / suspect 'restricted breed dogs	Annual
Consultation with owners of dogs declared as 'dangerous', 'menacing' and/or are a 'restricted breed' dog	Ongoing
Information provided at council and community events annual event about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the implications of owning a restricted breed, dangerous or menacing dog</li> <li>▪ preventative measures</li> </ul>	As opportunities arise
Information provided on council website as to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the appropriate housing of 'dangerous', 'menacing' and/or a 'restricted breed' dog</li> <li>▪ appropriate selection of dogs for the family and community environment</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<b>DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESSES</b>	
Provision of written material provided by state government at council offices	Ongoing
Information on council's website to support DABs comply with relevant legislation and best practice	Ongoing