

Domestic Animal Welfare Support Policy

Policy statement

Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea Councils (the three Councils) are committed to providing temporary care of domestic animals (pets) owned by residents at risk of or in a crisis due to family violence.

Principles

The Domestic Animal Welfare Support Policy is informed by the following City of Whittlesea Community Building Principles:

Equity, access and inclusion

We support the development of a safe and inclusive community, and promote respect for diverse values, abilities, beliefs, cultural practices and ways of living. Council ensures safe and inclusive practices and respect for community members experiencing hardship or crisis.

Collaboration and partnerships

We support, coordinate or lead community building efforts in a spirit of partnership and collaboration with relevant local stakeholders and all levels of government to achieve positive community outcomes.

Community outcomes

We are focused on achieving positive and equitable community outcomes by gathering, analysing and sharing information to inform decision making with a consideration for long term planning.

In addition, this Policy is informed and guided by the principles and practices of specialist family violence support services and Victoria Police Family Violence Units.

Objectives

The Domestic Animal Welfare Support Policy will:

- Provide a timely response to requests for temporary boarding of domestic animals (cats and dogs) at the Epping Animal Welfare Facility (EAWF) by liaising with Victoria Police and/or relevant support agencies. Other animals may be considered on a case by case basis.
- Provide the framework for the development of procedures to:
 - Develop formalised agreements with relevant support agencies.
 - Promote the Council support to relevant service providers and Victoria Police and ensure that these agencies are aware of legislative requirements for domestic animals that need temporary boarding.
 - Ensure the occupational health and safety of Council staff and contractors through the implementation of approved service procedures.

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- Promote consultation and engagement and seek feedback from service providers and Victoria Police to inform service development and reviews.
- Facilitate collaboration between EAWF partners and RSPCA (Vic) contractors in regular service reviews to ensure that the service objectives continue to be met.

Context

This Policy has been developed jointly by the Cities of Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea and RSPCA (Vic) regarding the shared Epping Animal Welfare Facility (EAWF).

Each of the three Councils has a commitment to assisting residents impacted by family violence where domestic animals are involved.

The three Councils recognise that for many reasons, domestic animals ('pets') cannot always be taken with a person into crisis accommodation and/or family violence refuge.

This can mean that a crisis is prolonged because the person impacted by family violence does not want to leave their pet.

In family violence situations, victims will often remain in the violence out of fear for the pets' safety and wellbeing.

Recognising this, the three Councils firmly believe they can assist in emergency/crisis situations by providing temporary care for domestic animals until the person and their pet can be reunited.

This Policy supports the implementation of each Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and provides the context for how and when temporary care for domestic animals will be provided.

Scope

This policy applies to Darebin, Moreland and Whittlesea Councils and RSPCA (Vic) through the partnership in place at the Epping Animal Welfare Facility and relates to residents and their domestic animals within these municipalities. This policy does not apply to restricted breed or declared dangerous dogs.

Implementation

Type of care and time limits

Temporary care for domestic animals will be provided for up to three weeks and can be a combination of foster care and through the EAWF. Extended timeframes will be considered on a case by case basis. Animals other than cats or dogs may be considered on a case by case basis.

Nominated Contact Person/Agency

If the owner of the domestic animal in care is unable to maintain suitable contact with the EAWF for the duration of its stay, a case worker or other person or agency must be nominated to fulfil this role.

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Costs

Specialist family violence services (or other relevant service agency) are requested to cover the cost of RSPCA (Vic)'s daily welfare boarding fee (currently \$5 per day) plus fees for vaccinations if applicable.

Microchipping and registration fees will be waived by each Council.

The cost of basic medical care will be borne by RSPCA (Vic) in accordance with its policies. More complex medical care will not be undertaken without the Owner's or Nominated Contact Person/Agency's consent as these costs will be borne by the Owner or via a support service.

Councils may opt to pay the initial costs and be reimbursed by the relevant specialist support service.

In instances where this is not possible, Councils will cover the cost of accommodation up to a limit of three weeks.

Reunification

Upon approaching the end of the domestic animal's stay, the Owner or Nominated Contact Person/Agency will be contacted by EAWF to arrange reunification.

RSPCA (Vic) will make all reasonable attempts to reunite the animal with its Owner, including contacting the local Victoria Police Family Violence Investigation Unit/s.

Where repeated attempts to contact the Owner or Nominated Contact Person/Agency have failed over a period of two weeks (after the agreed care period has ended), the animal will be deemed to be abandoned and will be subject to usual RSPCA processes.

Monitoring and review

The three Councils are committed to service and performance review and to comply with all relevant legislation, regulations, standards and sector best practice.

A review will occur in 12 months from the date of endorsement or earlier to respond to amended legislation or contract arrangements.

Relevant procedures and a Memorandum of Understanding with RSPCA (Vic) and relevant specialist support services will be developed.

Key linkages

All City of Whittlesea policies comply with the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*.

This policy has clear linkages to a range of codes, charters, legislation and Council documents:

- Victorian Domestic Animals Act 1994
- Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008
- Domestic Animal Management Plan (Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea Councils)

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- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea Councils)
- Preventing Violence Against Women and/or Family Violence Strategy/Plan (Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea Councils)
- RSPCA (Vic) Visitation Procedures.

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