

### Item 3.3

#### Support for Responsible Pet Ownership

File No: S051491

#### Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

For decades I have advocated for changes to improve the welfare of companion animals and the rights of pet owners, including for people renting and living in apartments.

In September 2023, Council unanimously supported my Lord Mayoral Minute calling for the NSW Government to allow [pets on public transport](#). Minister Haylen has confirmed she will investigate these changes in consultation with interested stakeholders including transport workers and people with disability.

And just last month, Virgin Australia announced their intention to trial people travelling with their pets in the cabin on domestic flights, if they are in a secure pet carrier. This too will require regulatory approval. There is growing demand in the community for people to be allowed to bring their pets as they travel locally or interstate, and increasingly people want to bring their dogs to work too.

In February 2024, I was invited to launch Amazon's newest dog playground at its corporate offices on Park Street in Sydney. This space is the latest addition to their Amazon Dogs at Work program which was developed in response to research they commissioned which found that 69 per cent of dog owners would love to bring their dogs to work.

As more people adopt pets and density increases, it is more important than ever that people are fully aware of their responsibilities to pick up after their dogs and control their behaviour around other dogs and people when in public.

Our rangers and companion animal officers promote responsible pet ownership by educating people about animal behaviour and safety through regular patrols of parks and open spaces, and through a range of community events. At the annual Pet Days in Waterloo and Surry Hills, social housing residents can access free pet health checks, microchipping, flea and worming treatments, and book free desexing.

Responsible pet ownership is also promoted through pop-up events at Harold Park and Kings Cross, and the Muddy Paws Festival. The City also encourages people to register their pets online by offering free collars and tags, subsidising desexing fees and offering free microchipping for pensioners and people on low incomes.

We do this because we know how important pets are to peoples' lives and wellbeing and we want to limit the number of pets that are abandoned.

#### Rehoming facilities

Due to the high cost of land in the inner city, the cost of building and operating our own animal shelter and rehoming facility with appropriate space for exercise is prohibitive for the City of Sydney.

So, since 2009, the City has partnered with and contributed to the Sutherland Animal Shelter, which cares for the City's lost and abandoned pets. The shelter has one of the lowest euthanasia rates in Australia, provides a high level of care and aims to rehabilitate and rehome every animal. Volunteers also walk and help care for these pets.

Recently, I was invited by the Mayor of Blacktown, Tony Bleasdale, to visit the Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre (BARC) in Glendenning. It provides shelter for 135 dogs and 230 cats for Blacktown City Council and several other Sydney councils. The Centre is also a place for the community to visit and adopt animals.

Opened in May 2023, BARC is the first state-of-the-art, custom-built animal rehoming centre in Australia and has been designed to improve animal assessment efficiency, reduce holding times, increase adoption rates and decrease euthanasia rates by providing each animal the maximum opportunity to rehabilitate and be adopted back out to the community.

Designed by Sam Crawford Architects, the centre has a handful of six finger-like buildings that connect to nature to create a safe and welcoming animal shelter that promotes pet adoption. Each building houses a different function - kennels, a cattery, vet facilities, back of the house.

The finger-like design allows the animals to have a direct connection to the surrounding landscape, increasing their interaction with nature and people. This layout minimises the animal's attention fatigue, discomfort from sound and supports comfortable temperatures with passive thermal ventilation maximizing cross ventilation. The design features minimise animal distress and help their rehabilitation and rehoming prospects. Large exercise spaces overlook the adjoining parklands. It is also safer for staff.

The multipurpose function area provides public education programs in animal training and pre-adoption courses for humans, aiming to maximise animal retention rates by adopters.

This is an excellent facility, which shows the model of larger shared facilities works well for metropolitan councils. When located on the fringes of metropolitan areas, they are more economical to build and operate. But already BARC is over capacity.

According to submissions to the NSW Senate Inquiry into pounds in NSW, rehoming facilities and organisations are in crisis. Submissions, including the [City of Sydney's submission](#), explained that the increase in pet ownership during the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by the current cost of living and rental affordability crisis combined with the continued restrictions on pets in rentals, together with the declining rates of volunteers means most shelters and rehoming organisations are over capacity.

On 22 March 2024, the Sydney Morning Herald reported aspiring tenants were abandoning high value pets to improve their chances of securing a new home. Pet rescue organisations say they are increasingly left to rehome high value cats such as ragdolls and British blues, as well as canine crosses like Labradoodles.

The RSPCA in NSW said it had seen a 66 per cent increase in people surrendering their animals because they could not find a pet-friendly rental. Over the last three years in the City of Sydney, we have seen a marked increase in the number of impounded animals and a decrease in the number of animals being collected by their owners, up from 44 dogs and 37 cats in 2021, to 84 dogs and 63 cats in 2023.

**Action needed**

In August 2023, the NSW Government consulted on proposed changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 to make it easier for renters to have pets, which the City's submission supported. However, we are yet to see those changes implemented. This crisis demands the NSW Government take urgent action to update these laws to limit the number of pets being abandoned.

We must also consider what else the City can do to prevent people being forced to give up their pets because they cannot afford necessary veterinary care for their companion animals.

**Recommendation**

It is resolved that:

- (A) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:
  - (i) investigate expanding access to subsidised veterinary services beyond Pet Day for people on low-incomes and experiencing financial hardship;
  - (ii) continue to educate people about responsible pet ownership; and
  - (iii) investigate how the City can further promote responsible pet ownership through the City's communication channels; and
- (B) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to:
  - (i) the NSW Minister for Better Regulation and Fair Trading asking the NSW Government to accelerate their review of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 to make it easier for renters to have pets and limit the number of pets being abandoned; and
  - (ii) the NSW Minister for Transport requesting an update on progress with implementing the necessary regulatory changes to allow pets on public transport, following Council's resolution in September 2023.

**COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO**

Lord Mayor