

Draft

Domestic Animal Management Plan
Discussion Paper

November 2012



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1. Introduction

Brimbank City Council is preparing a new Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) to replace the existing plan adopted in 2007. The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act) requires plans to be prepared by every Council in Victoria at four yearly intervals.

This Discussion Paper has been prepared to provide background information about domestic animal management in the City of Brimbank and encourage community discussion and feedback about the new DAMP.

2. The Domestic Animal Management Plan

Under section 68(A) of the Act, the DAMP must:

- 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 the Act and the regulations;
- outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of the Act in the Council's municipal district;
- outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district to:
 - promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats;
 - ensure that people comply with the Act, the regulations and any related legislation;
 - minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals;
 - address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats;
 - encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats;
 - minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance;
 - effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and the regulations.
- provide for the review of existing orders made under the 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;
- 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; and
- provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

In addition to these matters, every Council must:

- review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan; and
- provide the Secretary of the Department of Primary Industries with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan; and
- publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

The DAMP only relates to the keeping of dogs and cats, as other animals kept as pets are not addressed in the Act.



3. Background information

The City of Brimbank's residential population in 2012 is 193,024 and is forecast to rise to 197,069 by 2016. Council estimates that by 2020 the population will reach 200,809.

Population increases, combined with a large proportion of younger families in the City of Brimbank, will lead to increases in pet ownership. It will also lead to increased use of public open space from all sectors of the community, including pet owners.

The recent trends in dog and cat registrations and Council's animal management services are outlined below.

Registration and service statistics

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Registrations				
Dogs	13,945	15,455	15,283	14,337
Cats	3,568	3,912	3,848	3,575
Service statistics				
Overall requests	5466	5073	5206	4998
Noise – barking dogs	320	273	237	273
Dogs complaints	763	673	726	698
Dog attacks and rushes	115	95	119	96
Stray/feral cats	592	560	533	519
Other animals (e.g. livestock)	192	192	185	228
Collections & impounds				
Dogs	1297	1234	1242	1179
Cats	1291	1240	1361	1237
Domestic animals businesses	5	5	5	5



4. Strategic directions

This section describes the key animal management issues in the City of Brimbank. An outline is provided about some of Council's current activities in relation to education and compliance. Following this, a number of new ideas listed as 'strategic directions' for the new DAMP are proposed.

4.1 Registration and identification

Registration figures over the last three years indicate that numbers are decreasing, this may be a response to Council's requirement for animals to be de-sexed prior to being registered. Compulsory de-sexing is aimed at reducing the number of unwanted and stray animals which otherwise result in high rates of euthanasia.

The decline in registrations may also be due in part to a general trend in the decrease in pet ownership across Australia, although the higher proportion of younger families in the City of Brimbank, which tend to have a high level of pet ownership, may counter this trend.

In addressing these issues, Council recognises the challenge of increasing the proportion of pets being registered. Currently, registration rates are higher for dogs compared to cats. Securing first and repeat registrations will be an ongoing challenge for Council.

A high proportion of residents in the City of Brimbank were born overseas - currently over 50% of the residential population. This creates language, communication and cultural barriers to engagement with Council services and regulations regarding responsible pet ownership and may also impact on registrations.

It is proposed to undertake research about the reasons for a decline in registrations so that evidence-based decisions can be made about Council's approach to this issue.

Current activities

Current education activities regarding registration and identification include:

- Annual community Pet Expo, and stalls at other community events, providing information regarding pet registrations and responsible pet ownership.
- Regular media releases promoting pet registration in local newspapers, on Council's website and in the 'Around Brimbank' newsletters.

Current compliance activities regarding registration and identification include:

- Annual registration of dog and cats, including the requirement to be microchipped and de-sexed.
- Annual mail out of dog and cat registration renewal forms, followed up with a reminder and final notice.
- A periodic doorknock of parts of the municipality to query householders on pet registration and ownership.
- Extended registration for animals newly registered within 3 months of the annual registration period.
- Regular microchipping days at Council premises and in association with local vets and pet shops.
- Free dog and cat transfer of registration when relocating to the City of Brimbank, if the animals are currently registered with another Council.

**Strategic directions:**

- Further promote the benefits of animal registration.
- Investigate improvements to the registration renewal systems that may be offered online.
- Increase education and awareness of legislated registration requirements and the associated benefits.
- Increase use of multi-lingual educational materials to reflect the high proportion of residents where English is a second language.
- Require dogs to be viewed by an Animal Management Officer in certain circumstances to establish the identity of the breed of the animal prior to registration or renewal.
- Undertake research to determine the causes of recent declines in the rate of animal registrations.
- Investigate incentives to increase registrations, including for the costs of de-sexing animals.

4.2 Nuisance animals

Barking dogs can be a source of nuisance for residents. Often it is a result of separation anxiety, boredom, external stimuli, traffic, other dogs barking, cats trespassing and territorialism. Council carries out investigations of barking dog complaints and involves both dog owners and affected residents in trying to resolve the situation.

Dogs and cats at large can also be a source of nuisance in the municipality. The number of dogs impounded within the City of Brimbank was 1,179 in 2010-2011. The number of cats impounded in the same period was 1,237.

Following impoundment, a small percentage of animals are reclaimed by their owners, most are offered for re-housing if they meet temperament and health requirements, or as a last resort the animal may be euthanased.

A recent change to the Domestic Animals Regulations means there is now no limit on the time animals can be kept in shelters (it was previously 28 days after which the animal needed to be euthanased). This is expected to reduce the euthanasia rate.

Council faces the challenge of a high feral/un-owned or semi-owned cat population. Council operates a free cat-trapping program for its residents. This process involves the applicant placing a notice in the mailboxes of neighbouring properties advising that a trapping program is taking place in the area. A trap is then provided and as cats are caught they are collected by an Animal Management Officer. This service is comparable to or exceeds those offered by neighbouring councils.



Current activities

Current education activities regarding nuisance animals include:

- Annual community Pet Expo, and stalls at other community events, including information and advice regarding animal nuisance.
- Notification and reminders to residents about fireworks displays at New Year's Eve, Lunar Festival and other times.
- Educational material through renewal notices, Council's customer service centres, Council's website and periodic letterbox drops about responsible pet ownership relating to confinement of cats and dogs and animal nuisance.
- Information on Council's website to report nuisance animal complaints.
- Media releases on preventing animal nuisance.

Current compliance activities regarding nuisance animals include:

- Prosecuting pet owners where applicable, in relation to breaches of Council's Local Law and non-compliance with the Act.
- Actively dealing with barking dog complaints and taking enforcement action where applicable;
- Programmed patrols of areas, including public parks.
- Providing cat traps.
- Providing a service for the collection of dogs, nuisance animals, stray animals and dog attacks.
- Annual inspection of all excess animal permit holders.
- Unscheduled inspections of all declared Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breeds dogs.

Strategic directions:

- Develop further awareness and education program. Particularly through schools.
- Increase cooperation with other agencies to improve education and awareness levels about nuisance animals within the community.
- Investigate changes to cat-trapping program accessibility, including an on-line self-service process.
- Investigate changes to barking dog complaint lodgement process and implement where appropriate.



4.3 Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

Council adopts and enforces the provisions of the Act in its activities aimed at identification and control of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs to ensure the safety of the community. Council has more than 120 dogs entered on the State Register of Dangerous and Restricted Breed Dogs - one of the highest amongst Victorian municipalities. Council is proactive in identifying restricted breed dogs under the standard gazetted by the State Government.

Current activities

Current education activities regarding dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs include:

- Regular media releases in all local newspapers, on Council's website and 'Around Brimbank' magazine advocating to the public to choose pets carefully.
- Information sent to all dog owners with information about dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs.

Current compliance activities regarding dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs include:

- Unscheduled audits of all properties housing declared dangerous, restricted breed and menacing dogs.
- Patrolling by Animal Management Officers of all areas of municipality to monitor dog behaviour and possible breaches relating to dogs being walked off-lead.
- Maintenance of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs on the Victorian Declared Dog Registry.
- Investigations all public reports of restricted breed dogs.

Strategic directions:

- Actively enforce restricted breed dog laws.
- Actively apply the gazetted standard to identify restricted breed dogs.
- Regular inspection regimes of premises where dangerous and restricted breed dogs are housed.
- Ensure that all educational and awareness materials are up to date and easily understood.



4.4 Dog attacks

In the last five years, Council has received an average of 106 reports of dog aggression each year, these range from minor displays of aggressive behaviour through to serious attacks. Unfortunately a fatal dog attack occurred within the City of Brimbank in August 2011. In all of these instances, people and other animals may be injured or suffer trauma. Approximately 80% of dog attacks occur in or around the home.

Council's Animal Management Officers provide education and advice on the effective control and confinement of animals to prevent attacks. Council issues fines and prosecutes serious attacks and has successfully prosecuted owners. In instances where a dog is identified as a serious threat to the community, Council or a magistrate may order that the dog be destroyed, or Council may declare the dog as a dangerous dog. This declaration places further and stricter controls on the dog and its owner in order to protect the community.

Current activities

Current education activities regarding dog attacks include:

- Regular media releases in local newspapers, on Council's website and 'Around Brimbank' magazine advocating to the public to control and confine their dog.
- Website and other information encouraging residents and visitors to report all dog attacks immediately.

Current compliance activities regarding dog attacks include:

- Full investigations into all complaints regarding alleged dog attacks (rush and/or physical attack).
- Enforcement action including the issuing of infringement notices and prosecution action where appropriate.
- Proactive patrolling by all Animal Management Officers to ensure compliance in designated off-leash parks.

Strategic directions:

- Continue to investigate reported dog attacks against current legislation.
- Develop educational and awareness materials to reduce the instances of dog attack and resulting injury within the community.
- Raise awareness of risk of dog attacks in the home and how to reduce these risks.
- Promote and encourage the reporting of dog attacks whether on public or private property.



4.5 Overpopulation and euthanasia

Brimbank City Council is one of only 6 Victorian municipalities which has an order in place making it compulsory for all animals to be de-sexed prior to registration, unless exempt. This requirement is aimed at reducing overpopulation and euthanasia rates for dogs and cats. This requirement may, however, have an effect on registrations as some owners choose not to register their pet with Council as they do not want to de-sex their pet and do not qualify for an exemption. As detailed in section 4.1 regarding animal registrations, it is proposed to undertake research to determine whether this is in fact the case.

Current activities

Current education activities regarding overpopulation and euthanasia include:

- Annual community Pet Expo, and stalls at other community events, providing information regarding breeding, de-sexing, excess animals procedures, breed recommendations, procedures for surrender and responsible pet ownership in general.
- Media releases promoting responsible pet ownership and issues relating to breeding and de-sexing in local newspapers, on Council's website and 'Around Brimbank' magazine.
- Readily accessible information through brochures and fact sheets from the Department of Primary Industries relating to animal keeping.

Current compliance activities regarding overpopulation and euthanasia include:

- Ensuring all dogs and cats are de-sexed prior to registration.
- Free hire of cat traps.
- Issuing infringement notices for dogs and cats found at large.

Strategic directions:

- Investigate possibilities of an incentives program for de-sexing of animals.
- Increased responsible pet ownership educational materials.
- Development of partnerships with local vets to educate the benefits of de-sexing of pets.
- Promote confinement of animals to owner's premises to prevent straying, breeding and possible euthanasia, if not registered.

4.6 Domestic Animal Businesses

Council has a focus on ensuring that businesses are operating in accordance with legislative requirements. Council's Animal Management Officers undertake annual and random inspections of all Domestic Animal Businesses.

Current activities

Current education activities regarding domestic animal businesses include:

- Providing all Domestic Animal Businesses with a copy of Code of Practice.
- Information relating to Domestic Animal Businesses on Council's website.
- Bureau of Animal Welfare fact sheets are available at the Council offices and distributed to all Domestic Animal Businesses as required.

Current compliance activities regarding domestic animal businesses include:

- Registration and renewal of all Domestic Animal Businesses.
- Annual and random audits of all Domestic Animal Businesses.
- Enforcement of breaches in relation to permit conditions, non-compliance and unregistered businesses.

Strategic directions:

- Continued inspection and regulation of Domestic Animal Businesses within Brimbank.
- Increased cooperation between Council and businesses to further education and awareness within the community.
- Follow-up non-compliance issues with information on required actions and timeframe for resolution, further inspections, and prosecutions where necessary.

4.7 Training of authorised officers

Council's Animal Management Unit is part of the City Compliance Department. Four (4) Animal Management Officers and 0.5 EFT Administration Officer are employed to deliver services relating to complaint resolution, investigation of dog attacks, dangerous and restricted breed dogs and management of animals in public spaces such as parks and city streets, this includes the impounding of wandering and stray animals. The officers are also responsible for administering inspections of domestic animal businesses within the municipality.

It is important that all Animal Management Officers are skilled and appropriately trained to deliver services and programs under the Act. It is desirable that all Animal Management Officers undertake a *Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation*. Officers also attend Bureau of Animal Welfare training sessions and other specific animal management programs to stay abreast of developments in the animal management areas.

Strategic directions:

- Develop and maintain a training register for individual Animal Management Officers detailing completed and proposed training and professional development.
- Officers keep up to date with animal management practices and legislative amendments.
- Regular opportunities for officers to attend industry training / networking sessions each year.
- Undertake further microchip implantation courses to augment officers already authorised.

5. Other matters

5.1 Local laws and orders

Brimbank City Council General Local Law 2008 requires dog owners to collect and dispose of their dog's droppings in public places and always carry a suitable device for the collection of animal excrement.

Brimbank City Council is one of only 6 Victorian municipalities which has an order in place under Section 26(2) of the Act, making it compulsory for all animals to be de-sexed prior to registration, unless exempt. These exemptions are in line with those listed in the Act and relate to the health of the animal and the owners membership of applicable organisations.

Brimbank City Council has an order under Section 26(2) of the Act requires dogs to be leashed in public places, except for designated off-leash areas. The following parks have designated off-leash areas:

Reserve Name	Address	Suburb
Bon Thomas Reserve	Quinn Street	Deer Park
Buckingham Reserve	2A Buckingham Crescent	Sunshine West
Caroline Chisholm Park	Old Calder Highway	Keilor
Collenso Street Electricity Easement (from Ridgeway Pde to the Western Ring Road)	Collenso Street	Sunshine West
Davitt Drive Reserve (north of Nash Place alignment)	Davitt Drive	Deer Park
Delahey Recreation Reserve/linear path (south of Goldsmith Ave)	53 Goldsmith Avenue	Delahey
Denton Avenue Reserve (west of the conservation area)	Denton Avenue	St Albans
Duke Street Reserve	Duke Street	Sunshine North
Green Gully Reserve (east of McCrae Blvd)	Green Gully Road	Keilor Downs
International Gardens Reserve	Cordelia Grove	St Albans
Keilor Downs Recreation Reserve	30 Belmont Avenue	Keilor Downs
Keilor Park Recreation Reserve	Stadium Drive	Keilor Park
Road Electricity Easement (inc Pintail Park but excluding the soccer grounds)	Kings/Robertsons	Taylors Lakes
Kororoit Creek Area	behind Rockbank Road	Albion
Nancy/Whitesides Reserve	2-20 Fitzgerald Road	Sunshine West
Opie Road Reserve	151 Neale Road	Deer Park
Roussac Reserve	14-28 Somerset Drive	Sunshine North
Sydenham Basin Reserve	Melton Highway	Sydenham
Taylors Creek Linear Path Electricity Easement	along Chichester Drive	Taylors Lakes
Tom O'Brien Park	1-41 Matthews Street	Sunshine
Wahgunyah Reserve	14-42 Wahgunyah Drive	St Albans

Notwithstanding the above mentioned list, dogs must also be on a leash in the following circumstances:

- In conservation areas;
- Within 30m of children's play areas;
- In the vicinity of BBQ and outdoor eating areas;
- During formal sports events (nominating specific times of events);
- In the vicinity of informal sports or social events;
- Within 5m of a walking or bike path; and
- Where there may be heavy pedestrian traffic to or from a school.

Public parks where dogs can be exercised off a leash are important to the health and well-being of dogs. Balancing the needs of dog owners and non-dog owners and visitors to the City of Brimbank is also important.

Strategic directions:

- Maintain the requirement for dog owners to collect and dispose of their dog's droppings in public places and always carry a suitable device for the collection of animal excrement.
- Maintain compulsory de-sexing of animals prior to registration.
- Review the designated off-leash areas and areas within existing off-leash areas to take account for recently constructed playgrounds and shared paths (**Attachment 1**).
- Review requirements regarding dogs at major public events and festivals.

5.2 Education

There is evidence and an increasing community view that enforcement of laws alone will not result in lasting voluntary changes in behaviour. Therefore, enforcement of the Act and Local Laws will be balanced with a focus on community education regarding responsible pet management. A range of education programs and services are provided, including:

- Community Pet Expo;
- information on the Council's website;
- media releases and advertisements;
- brochures and information kits;
- use of the Council's message-on-hold service to deliver responsible pet ownership messages.

Brimbank City Council's education priorities over the last four years have included:

- de-sexing of pets;
- registration and identification of pets
- pet health and wellbeing;
- control and confinement of pets;
- identifying and adopting the appropriate controls for dangerous and restricted breed dogs;



- visits to schools to speak about animal safety;
- involvement with the “living in your neighbourhood” sessions for newly arrived migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The effective and efficient use of resources is a priority for Council. Council will continue to work closely with State Government and other agencies to coordinate efforts in domestic animal management.

An increased proportion of all registration revenue is provided to the State Government to use in the development of state wide education programs. These have included the education in schools program (particularly educating primary school age children in safety around dogs) and the ‘Who’s for Cats’ campaign which has sought to reduce the incidence of semi-owned cats in the community.

Strategic directions:

- Increased use of online information and social media to promote responsible pet ownership.
- Tailoring of education and information provision to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Education about the costs of owning a pet including de-sexing, vaccinations, training, food, shelter and secure keeping.
- Increased emphasis on education and information regarding dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs, and preventing dog attacks, particularly in the home.

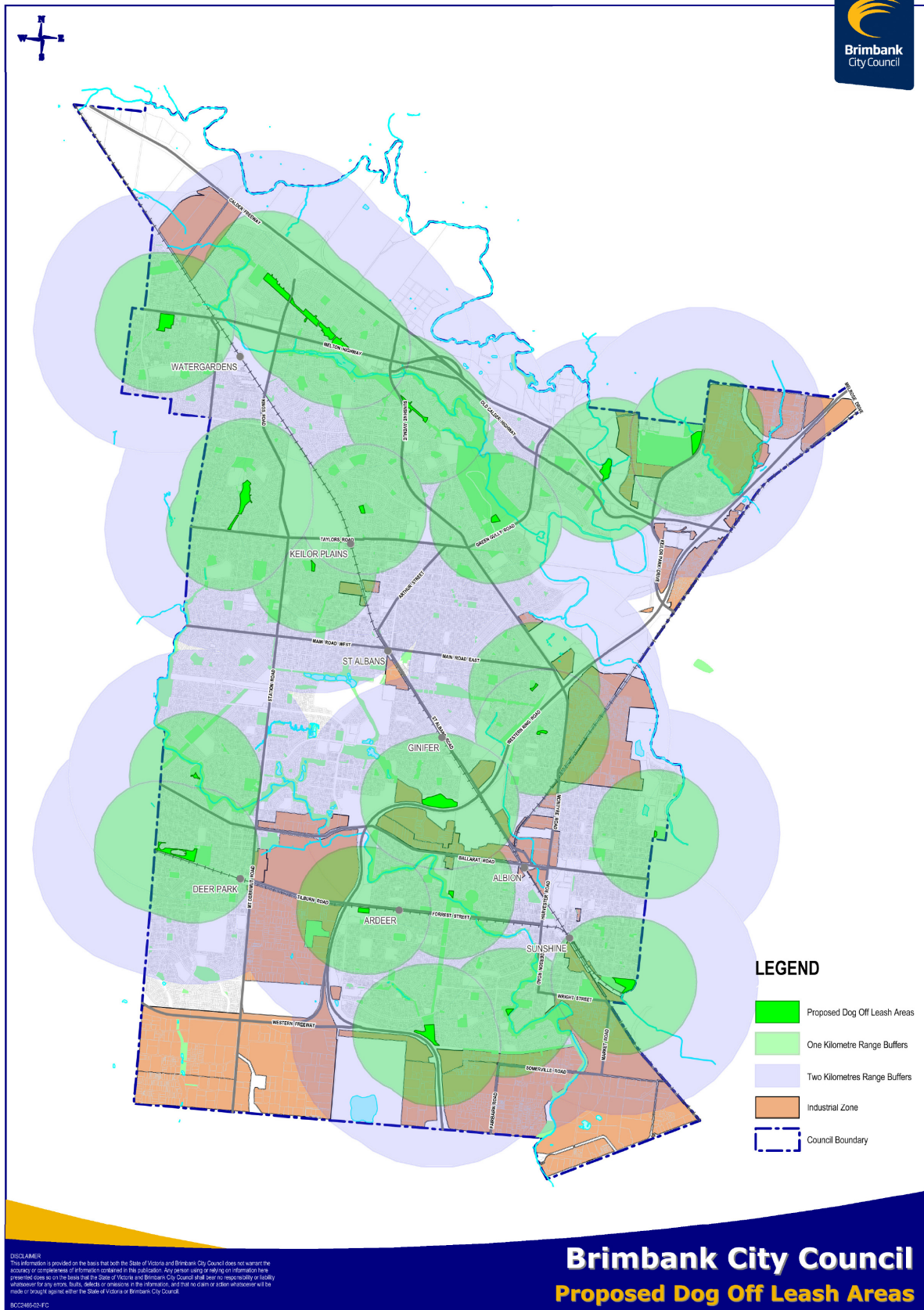
6. Next steps

Brimbank City Council is interested in your views on its animal management service and the development of its new Domestic Animal Management Plan.

You may wish to attend a community forum where you can find out more about domestic animal management and provide your ideas in person, or you can make a written submission by mail or email. Further information is available on Council’s website www.brimbank.vic.gov.au.

Following the consultation period, a draft plan will be prepared for community discussion and comment, and finally Council’s consideration.

Appendix 1 Proposed Dog Off Leash Areas



Language link



Arabic	عربي	9209 0131
Croatian	Hrvatski	9209 0132
Greek	Ελληνικά	9209 0133
Italian	Italiano	9209 0134
Macedonian	Македонски	9209 0135
Serbian	Српски	9209 0136
Spanish	Español	9209 0137
Turkish	Türkçe	9209 0138
Vietnamese	Việt-ngữ	9209 0139
All other languages		9209 0140
English		9209 0141

Local call costs apply

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