

CITY OF



MITCHAM

4 April 2013

NOTICE OF MEETING

NOTICE is hereby given of the following Meeting to be held in the Council Chambers, 131 Belair Road, Torrens Park on **Tuesday 9 April 2013** commencing as follows:-

- **General Purpose Committee Meeting** will commence at 6.30 pm.

A light meal will be provided at 6.00pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Pears".

MATTHEW PEARS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

CITY OF



MITCHAM

AGENDA

FOR THE

**GENERAL PURPOSE
COMMITTEE MEETING**

TO BE HELD ON

TUESDAY 9 APRIL 2013

COMMENCING AT 6.30 PM





9. OPERATIONAL

9.1 BY-LAW CATS - REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

*Craig Harrison/Stephen Saffin/Roger Brown (Meeting Date: 9 April 2013)
(Ref: FF/2011/3719)*

PROPOSAL

To provide a report on the progress of the implementation of By-law No.6 Cats and future action in conjunction with the Dog and Cat Management Plan 2012-2017.

The report outlines the activities and achievement since the introduction of By-law No. 6 – Cats and reviews the need for continuation of the Cat Management Program in accordance with the Dog and Cat Management Plan 2012-2017 as previously endorsed by Council.

BACKGROUND

By-law No. 6 – Cats was enacted by Council in August 2010 as a result of a survey where 90% of residents surveyed supported the introduction of the By-Law. (*McGregor Tan Research 2009*)

Since the introduction of By-law No. 6 – Cats, the following activities have taken place:

Brochures on “Responsible Pet Ownership” were distributed to Mitcham residents detailing the requirements relating to registration, micro-chipping and the number of cats that can be kept on premises.

Discounted micro-chipping days were held by Council resulting in some 300 pets being micro-chipped and registered with Council. A further discounted micro-chipping day was organised by Pet Stock, South Road, Melrose Park and assisted by Council in February, 2013 where 200 pets were micro-chipped.

A residential Survey was conducted in 2011 which revealed that 49% of the residents surveyed were aware of the Council’s Cat By-Law, while 42% were not. This will be reviewed in the 2013 residential survey. (The dog and Cat Management Plan – Key Performance Area 1 provides for Council to introduce programs to increase the number of registrations and cats micro-chipped).

As of 1 March 2013 there are 2,188 cats recorded as being registered with Council.

Residents who have been reported to have an unregistered cat have been contacted by the Cat Management Officer. The majority (95%) of such residents have registered their cat without further action having to be taken. An expiation has been issued where a resident has failed to register their cat after due Notice has been given.



Education programs have been conducted by attending schools and speaking with students in relation to "Responsible Pet Ownership". This has been well received. During 2013 it is proposed to speak to all schools in the Mitcham Council area. The program is currently being organised through the Dog and Cat Management Board as part of their "Living Safely with Pets" and will advise and educate children through song, dance and structured actions how to avoid dog attacks and the requirements regarding "Responsible Pet Ownership".

It has been organised for the Cat Management Officer to be present during the visits to Mitcham Schools to discuss responsible cat ownership. This includes the need for cats to be micro-chipped and registered with Council and also informs of the limit on the number of cats that can be kept. It is also emphasised with students the need for a cat to be confined to the cat owner's residence to prevent the cat becoming a nuisance to neighbours. During these visits students often provide information regarding problems that their parents are having with nuisance cats.

Displays relating to "Responsible Pet Ownership" and requirements for registering cats have been displayed at the Royal Adelaide Show; Mitcham Cultural Village (Sustainable Living event) and Blackwood, Pasadena and South Road shopping centres. Banners are displayed throughout the Mitcham Council area notifying residents of the need to register their cat. This is an ongoing program of promotion.

Contrary to belief the Council Officers are not responsible for the capture and removal of stray cats. Any problem relating to stray cats is the responsibility of the residents. However the Cat Management Officer does provide advice and support to elderly and disabled residents where required to assist in helping them to resolve their concerns. Letter box drops are carried out in some cases to establish the identity of nuisance cats and extent of the concern. This approach has received favourable feedback from residents and has been very useful in resolving problems. It should be noted that stray cats taken to the RSPCA have often been found to carry diseases such as FIV; feline leukaemia and cancer which can be harmful to domestic cats.

Information supplied to residents includes various means they can utilise to keep cats from entering their garden. Council also provides information on requirements regarding the capturing of a cat should the need arise. The main complaints from residents relate to nuisance cats (spraying on doorsteps; fighting with other cats; killing native wildlife and generally creating a nuisance in their garden). In such cases the Cat Management Officer circulates letters to surrounding neighbours to ascertain the extent of the problem and also for the purpose of identifying the cat owner. If the owner of the cat can be identified, the Cat Management Officer will provide the cat owner with information as to what can be done to confine a cat to their premises. In most cases this has proved to be successful with only a few official Orders only having had to be issued for the cat/s to be confined to the cat owner's premises, breaches of which can result in expiations being issued.

The Cat Management Officer's primary objective is educating Mitcham cat owners in relation to "Responsible Cat Ownership". The majority of



complaints relate to residents complaining about neighbouring cats that wander onto their property and create a nuisance.

Official complaints since the commencement of the employment of the Cat Management Officer in February 2011 are:-

BAGGAGE WARD	55
BOORMAN WARD	75
CRAIGBURN WARD	51
GAULT WARD	40
OVERTON WARD	38
THE PARK	34

The above figures do not include residents who require advice on managing cat problems (people who wish to remain anonymous) or report their cat as lost. Prior to the introduction of the cat By-Law there were very few complaints as Council did not have the resources nor legislation to directly assist them.

Since the introduction of the Cat By-Law residents have become aware (mainly through word of mouth and publicity) of the assistance Council is able to provide and consequently there has been a dramatic increase in the number of cat complaints. It is anticipated in due course and as complaints are being resolved that we should see a decline in the number of complaints. As the By-law is relatively new this process may take some time.

Since compulsory micro-chipping has been introduced by Council many lost cats have been able to be returned to their owner and consequently this has resulted in a reduction in the numbers of cats being taken to shelters.

The RPCA are in full support of the Mitcham Council's Cat Management Program and Cat By-Law and have reported that since the introduction of compulsory micro-chipping there has been a 50% increase in the number of cats in the Mitcham Council area that have been able to be identified and returned to their owner.

With the commencement of cat advertising campaigns, residents have appreciated the assistance provided by Council in managing cats that have strayed onto their property. A survey was conducted with residents who had complained about nuisance cats to ascertain if they were satisfied with the service provided. All residents surveyed were pleased with the service provided and wanted the service to continue.

There has been some public support for the proposition that stray cats should be captured, de-sexed and returned to their location as a means of reducing the number of stray cats. Importantly such action is in breach of legislation (*Section 179 Natural Resources Management Act 2004*) and research has found that this will not resolve cat problems. These cats can continue to spread diseases and cause a nuisance. (*Refer paper on Conservation Biology, Volume 23, No. 4 887-894 – Society of Conservation Biology, Dept of Geography, University of California, 2008*).



The Cat Management Officer has managed to resolve the majority of issues through letterbox drops; locating the cat owner (via microchip identification) and by conducting door knocks. Most of the issues have related to cats destroying native fauna; spraying on door steps; fighting with other cats and generally causing a nuisance. The majority of complaints stem from elderly residents who request Council assistance.

Where a complaint is received from a resident about a nuisance cat, literature on "Responsible Cat Ownership" has been provided to all parties. This includes information on ways to discourage cats from entering properties. However, if this is not successful and the owner of the nuisance cat is known, the Cat Management Officer has assisted in providing details to the offending cat owner on how they can best confine the cat to their premises. (e.g. construction of a 'Cat Run") To date this has been successful.

In cases where the owner of the cat is not known and the cat continues to be a nuisance, then the aggrieved resident can hire a "cat cage" from the Council; RSPCA or other businesses and capture the cat and take it to an Animal Shelter or Veterinarian. In most cases where the cat is not claimed by the rightful owner, then every endeavour is made to find a new home for the cat. Only in extreme circumstances will a cat be euthanized (usually due to health reasons).

Importantly Council would continue to receive complaints and enquiries with respect to cat management issues with or without a By-Law and or cat management program in place and as such it would still be necessary for Council to allocate resources to manage these matters without the receipt of the registration income. The By-law and established Cat Management Program provides a necessary policy framework and guidance to enable such matters to be managed.

The Cat Management Officer's primary objective is education and developing proactive strategies and to co-ordinate the strategic directions contained in the Dog and Cat Management Plan 2012-2017.

In regards to an owners failure to register a cat, the Cat Management Officer has identified 70 residents who have failed to register their cat/s. Notices are issued to such owners advising them of their requirement to register their cat. In most cases owners have responded and registered their cat. The Cat Management Officer has only needed to issue two expiation notices at this stage where a resident has failed to register their cat.

Attachments – Nil.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES/POLICY POSITION

Objective 2.2 Ensure biodiversity, natural habitats and ecosystems are Protected and enhanced.

Strategy 2.2.1 Biodiversity Areas: Protect and expand areas of indigenous vegetation within Council's woodland Reserves, and enhance waterways, linear reserves and vegetation corridors



Objective 3.2 Encourage community engagement and participation

Strategy 3.2.2 Community involvement: Encourage and support people becoming more involved in their local community through education, information and incentives.

Objective 4.2 Ensure that the organisation is responsible, professional, effective, resilient and accountable.

Strategy 4.2.5 Compliance: Meet Council's legislative obligations and Increase community awareness through education and enforcement activities.

Strategy 4.2.6 Decision Making: Ensure effective decision making through strategic planning and policy development within a consultative framework.

SUMMARY OF OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Option 1 (Staff Recommendation)

Council endorses the continuation of the Cat Management Program to implement the future objectives in the Dog and Cat Management Plan 2012-2017 and By-Law No. 6 – Cats with regular reporting to be provided to Council as part of the Organisational Performance Report.

Option 2

Council give consideration to increasing the resources allocated to the Cat Management Program to enhance the implementation of the Dog and Cat Management Plan 2012- 2017 and By-Law 6 Cats with a Budget Bid to be considered as part of the 2013/2014 Budget considerations.

Option 3

Council no longer continues to fund the Cat Management Program and instructs Council's Administration to commence the process to revoke By-Law 6 - Cats.

DISCUSSION OF OPTIONS

OPTION 1 (Staff Recommendation)

The 2011 Annual Resident Survey conducted by McGregor Tan Research found that 42% of residents were unaware of the introduction of the Cat By-law. Consideration needs to be given to continuing community education and promotion activities as part of the responsible cat ownership strategy. It is anticipated that through greater exposure there will be an increase in



community awareness of the Cat By-law and therefore an increase in registration and compliance.

The Dog and Cat Management Plan 2012 -2017 which has been endorsed by Council includes the need for an increase in Registrations and Micro-chipping. This is to be undertaken through media campaigns, educational programs and conducting doorknocks in selected areas during the next 1-3 years.

Council's Cat Management Officer has developed a positive rapport with residents and has managed to resolve a wide range of problems relating to cats. Cat issues are different from dog issues, primarily because identifying a nuisance cat can take time to identify the owner and then communicate with the owner to try and resolve the problem. Many residents have stated they have had problems with cats for many years and are now grateful that the Council has employed a Cat Management Officer who is able to provide assistance.

Council also employs a Senior Compliance Officer/Animal Management who is full time managing dog issues and the day to day issues relating to compliance issues and as such does not have sufficient time to provide assistance to residents with cat problems. It is anticipated that the costs of administering the Cat Management Program can be met from growing cat registration fees.

Without the employment of a dedicated Cat Management Officer, many of the complaints raised by residents would not be able to be undertaken (e.g. attending school programs; displays at shopping centres; the cultural village; maintaining statistical data and negotiating with residents to resolve issues). Importantly Council would continue to receive these complaints and enquiries with respect to cat management issues with or without a By-Law and or cat management program in place and as such it would still be necessary for Council to allocate resources to manage these matters without the receipt of the registration income. The By-law and established Cat Management Program provides a necessary policy framework and guidance to enable such matters to be managed. Given that Council would still incur expenses in handling cat management issues the cost neutral.

With the introduction of the Cat By-law, Mitcham Council is now becoming widely recognised as a leader in cat management controls and other Councils are considering following Mitcham Council's example given the successful outcomes being achieved.

This is supported by comments made by the Chairperson at the recent Parliamentary Select Committee Hearing where favourable comments were made in regards to the performance of Mitcham Council's cat By-Law (March 2013); favourable comments by the Dog and Cat Management Board's Chair person at the launch of the "Living safely with Pets" School Educational Program (March 2013) and comments by the Hon. Bob Such in the Messenger Press (March 2013) stating other Councils should follow Mitcham Council's example regarding cat management. Also publicity (from an Animal Recue Farm) stating that since the introduction of the cat By-Law there has



been a noticeable decrease in the number of wild life destroyed. (Eastern Courier 2011).

Other Councils (Burnside; Marion; Holdfast; Salisbury; Gawler) have had discussions with Mitcham Council regarding the introduction of a cat By-Law. Mitcham Council is seen as a leader in this regard and the effectiveness of Mitcham Council's By-Law is being examined by other Councils.

In regards to the effectiveness of the cat By-Law, this can be judged by the eventual decrease in the number of cat complaints; the success of micro-chipping (already the RSPCA have stated 50% of cats have been able to be returned to their owner) a reduction in the reports of wild life being destroyed; favourable publicity and comments by Politicians which has enhanced Mitcham Council's civic pride and community standing.

OPTION 2

Increasing the resources allocated to the Cat Management Program would allow a more comprehensive publicity program and assist in the direct implementation of the Key Performance Areas outlined in Council's Dog and Cat Management Plan 2012 -2017. However with the present rate at which the increase in cat registration is growing each year it may be more prudent to increase resources as registration grows to cover the finances needed to fund the increase.

OPTION 3

This may be seen as a backward step given the Community support and leadership shown by Mitcham Council in implementing a Cat By-Law in the first place. It may send a mixed message to our community about how serious Council is about managing our By-Laws generally.

Without a dedicated Cat Management Program at this stage the momentum achieved in registration and micro-chipping would reduce and response time to actioning of complaints would increase. Should this option be adopted then the Council's By Law 6 would be required to be revoked and importantly there are a number of complaints that Council would continue to receive with or without the Cat Management Program in place which Council would still be required to address to some degree, receive the complaint and liaise with the resident.

Council would therefore still incur expenses without the opportunity to receive registration income nor the legislation necessary to manage and or resolve the complaint.

Council has received much favourable feedback and publicity so as to cancel the program would undoubtedly bring negative publicity and detrimental impact upon Council's image.

Community Implications

The introduction of a unique, relevant and practical By-law focussing on limiting the number of cats that can be kept on a premise and to provide for



the control and management of cats within the Council area ensures good governance and arguably safer environment.

Economic Implications

None apparent.

Environment/Heritage Implications

The introduction of this By-law arguably helps protect the fauna and health of residents within the City of Mitcham.

Cost Shifting Implications

Nil

Impact on Budget and Life Cycle Implications

It is anticipated that continued funding for the Cat Management Program and the ongoing engagement of the Cat Management Officer would largely be drawn from
Annual registration fees received.

As at the end February 2013

Cat Registrations (Renewal)	\$26,688 (YTD)
Cat Registrations (New)	\$ 6,119 (YTD)

Total received	\$32,807 (YTD)
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Total Expenditure	\$27,199 (YTD)
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Total expected income at the end of the financial year is \$33,500

Total expenditure expected by the end of the financial year is \$43,000

Whilst the estimated cost to the Council for the Cat Management Program, including materials and equipment is \$9,500, arguably this is already a cost neutral service as previously mentioned Council would continue to receive and be required to address many of the complaints with or without a By-Law and Cat Management Program in place. It is envisaged that the costs of handling those complaints would be of a similar expense and or greater expense to Council.

Staffing Implications

The Cat Management Officer commenced employed on a part time basis in February 2011. The current annual salary for the Cat Management Officer is \$37,645 (as at 18/2/13) on a part time basis. (3 days per week)

It is anticipated that the ongoing engagement of the Cat Management Officer will be covered by the growing annual registration fees.



Risk Management/OHS Implications

The continuation of the Cat Management Program and the introduction of a unique, relevant and practical By-law allows Council to manage its obligations and associated risks to improve the environment and public safety.

Engagement

Community and stakeholder engagement is an integral part of the implementation strategy and communication plan. Engagement through education; micro-chipping days; resolving residential concerns with nuisance cats have all been positive. Feedback from the RSPCA, Dog and Cat Management Board, other agencies and Council's have been very supportive.

Publicity and Community Response

From surveys conducted the majority of residents have supported the introduction of By-law No. 6 – Cats. A survey conducted with residents who have received assistance through Council's Cat Management Program have all appreciated the service provided and requested the continuation of this service.

Publicity on the Cat Management Project has been viewed on the ABC's 7.30 report where Mayor Picton was interviewed.

There have been favourable articles in the Messenger Press stating there had been a decrease in the destruction of wild life since the introduction of the City of Mitcham's Cat By-law and that the position be reviewed in 3 years to determine continuation of the role.

CONCLUSION

As the community continues to become aware of Council's initiatives, it is anticipated registrations will increase and awareness in relation to responsible cat ownership will also increase. Mitcham Council is being seen by many as a leader in this area.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – ITEM 9.1

Option 1 (Staff Recommendation)

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Option 3

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