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Hawkesbury Companion Animal Shelter Report

Hawkesbury City Council

Hawkesbury Companion Animal Shelter

Hawkesbury City Council
June 2019

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Review of the Hawkesbury Animal Shelter

This report summarises the work that has been undertaken by the Companion Animal Shelter Working Group and Council staff following a Notice of Motion moved at Council's Ordinary Meeting on 9 May 2017.

The Notice of Motion required that Council look at a range of issues including costs, numbers of animals coming into the Hawkesbury Companion Animal Shelter, re-homing and euthanasia rates, opening hours, and how the Hawkesbury Shelter reflects best practice in animal management practices. In response to the Notice of Motion, Council established a Working Group to work through each element of the Notice of Motion and explore other issues relevant to the review.

In addition to working through the points within the Notice of Motion, the review of the Shelter also comprised:

- Assessment of Hawkesbury Shelter's animal management practices and operations compared to Blacktown, Campbelltown and Blue Mountains

- Consulting with current volunteers to understand what is working and what could be improved

- Consulting with Rescue Groups to understand what is working and what could be improved

- Developing documents for increased effectiveness in engaging and managing volunteers

- Reviewing and updating the fees and charges

- Reviewing and updating the Service Agreement with councils using the Shelter, and;

- Undertaking some Capital Work improvements.

A review of the Shelter and engagement with various stakeholders has shown that the overall service aligns with the practices of other shelters. However a number of suggestions for improvement were received and are being implemented, including changes to the website, increased community education programs, updating the Adoption Kits, improving photographs and information regarding each animal, developing documentation for the management of volunteers and implementing some Capital Works improvements.

The review has identified further actions that will be implemented over time, such as seeking opportunities to fund a social media resource for the Shelter, undertaking promotional campaigns to educate the community and share good news stories of animals that have been re-homed, reviewing the Shelter Induction Program to ensure better engagement and management of volunteers, and implementation of further Capital Works improvements.

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

2.1. Notice of Motion

A Notice of Motion was moved at Council's Ordinary Meeting on 9 May 2017, the details of which are outlined below.

In response to the Notice of Motion, Council established a Working Group to work with Council staff to work through each element of the Notice of Motion:

(a)   Collect statistics and trends including but not limited to the following:

- handling staff to animal ratio
- vaccination rates and costs
- de-sexing rates and costs
- number of animals taken from each LGA
- funds sought and recovered from each LGA
- number of animals returned to previous owners, number re-homed and number re-homed via rescue groups
- number of animals euthanased and number of dogs euthanased due to aggressive behaviour
- volunteer numbers and hours worked

(b)   Make recommendations to ensure that the Hawkesbury Companion Animal Shelter meets or exceeds best practice guidelines for monitoring, caring for and exercising animals as well as cleaning and security of facilities.

(c)   Review the operating hours of the Shelter to best reflect the needs of Hawkesbury families and improve access.

(d)   Recommend website content to promote the retrieval and re-homing of animals at the Shelter (including a photo, type of dog / cat, gender, description, location and date of retrieval, date the dog is due for release), works to improve public education about animal ownership to reduce the number of lost, stray and dumped animals and identify programs recommending high volume, low cost de-sexing programs to reduce the number of lost, stray and dumped animals.

(e)   Identify / confirm suitable animal care training packages for staff involved in animal handling, with the minimum being a Certificate II in Animal Studies.

(f)   Recommend ongoing reporting arrangements to Council and the wider community.

(g)   Liaise with WSROC regarding a region-wide rationalisation of companion animal shelters.

3. WORKING GROUP

3.1. Composition of the Companion Animal Working Group

Expressions of Interest for community representation on the Companion Animal Working Group were called for and on 12 September 2017, Council, in a closed session, appointed four community representatives to the Working Group.

The Working Group comprised:

- Two Councillors

- Four community representatives (including representatives of the Friends of the Hawkesbury Companion Animal Shelter and local rescue organisations) and;

- Relevant staff.

3.2. Meetings Held

The Working Group convened on the following dates:

- 5 March 2018

- 27 May 2018

- 21 August 2018

- 27 November 2018

- 18 February 2019

- 6 May 2019

A meeting is to be scheduled in July to advise of the outcomes of the report to Council and to thank the members of the Working Group.

4. REVIEW OF THE HAWKESBURY COMPANION ANIMAL SHELTER

For effective performance the Hawkesbury Companion Animal Shelter requires all three pillars of operations, animal management practices and the physical infrastructure to perform well.

This section assesses Hawkesbury Shelter's animal management practices, costs and operations, compared with Blacktown, Campbelltown and Blue Mountains and outlines the current and planned Capital Works for the Hawkesbury Shelter.

4.1. Operations

Table 1 below provides a summary of key statistics and information in relation to operations as compared with other shelters.

As can be seen there are variations with opening hours. The Working Group noted that all the shelters except for Hawkesbury are closed on public holidays and have recommended that Council management consider that the Shelter not open on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Opening Hours	Hawkesbury	Blacktown	Campbelltown	Blue Mountains RSPCA
Mon - Fri	9am -12:30pm 2pm - 4:30pm	8:30am - 4:30pm	10am - 4pm	10am - 3:30pm Closed Wednesday
Saturday	9:30am - 11.30am	9am - 1pm	9am - 12pm	10am - 3:30pm
Sunday	7am - 9:30am	9am - 11am	Closed	10am - 3:30pm
Public Holidays	7am - 9:30am Except ANZAC Day and Christmas Day	Closed	Closed	Closed
Own Facebook	No	Yes	No	Yes
Council Facebook	Yes	No	Yes	No
Staff Qualifications	Vet nurse experience	Vet nurse experience	Vet nurse experience	Vet nurse experience and Vet on staff

Opening Hours	Hawkesbury	Blacktown	Campbelltown	Blue Mountains RSPCA
Staff Training	All training provided as required	All training provided as required	All training provided as required	All training provided as required
Areas Serviced	Hawkesbury Penrith The Hills Hornsby	Cumberland Ryde Canada Bay Lane Cove Willoughby Hunters Hill	Campbelltown	Blue Mountains

Table 1: Operations

4.2. Animal Management Practices and Costs

Table 2 below provides a summary of key statistics and information in relation to animal management as compared with Blacktown, Campbelltown and Blue Mountains RSPCA.

The data in the table demonstrates that across many factors all shelters have similar practices such as 100% vaccination rates and 100% de-sexing of animals prior to being re-homed, and euthanasia criteria.

The variations across the shelters were more in relation to costs such as health checks and impound fees. The reason that Hawkesbury Shelter impound fees are higher is due to the fact that an additional vaccination is administered to reduce the incidence of kennel cough and reduce the requirement for further veterinary visits.

	Hawkesbury	Blacktown	Campbelltown	Blue Mountains RSPCA
Number of Animals 2018	Dogs - 1375 Cats - 1056	Dogs - 1637 Cats - 2253	Dogs - 1280 Cats - 1112	Dogs - 226 Cats - 211
Number of Kennels	68	72	58	50
Volunteers	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Volunteer Hours per Week (approx.)	15	30	N/A	20
Employs a Behaviourist	No	No	No	Yes
Cleaning kennels	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily

	Hawkesbury	Blacktown	Campbelltown	Blue Mountains RSPCA
Cleaning Catteries	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Exercising dogs	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Socialising cats	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Percentage of Animals Vaccinated	100%	100%	100%	100%
Vaccination Costs - recouped	100% (Unless sold via fire sales)	$10-15 per animal (approx.)	100%	NOT recouped by RSPCA
De-sexing Rates	100% for animals re-homed	100% of animals adopted	100% for animals re-homed	100% for animals re-homed
De-sexing Costs	Female dog - $175 Female cat - $110 Male dog - $132 Male cat - $55	Female dog - $195 Female cat - $120 Male dog - $145 Male cat - $60	Female dog - $175 (over 15kg) Female dog - $125 (under 15kg) Female cat - $70 Male dog - $120 Male cat - $30	Task undertaken by vets on staff
Health Check Cost	$50	$77	$45	In-house by vet
Impound Fees	$106.30 plus a day rate of $40.60	$74 plus a day rate of $45	$84 plus a day rate of $26	$36 plus a day rate of $51
Animals Returned to Owners	Dogs - 556 or 40% Cats - 36 or 3%	Dogs - 753 or 46% Cats - 45 or 2%	Dogs - 691 or 54% Cats - 62%	Dogs - 66.8% Cats - 10%
Animals re-Homed / Sold	Dogs - 603 or 44% Cats - 354 or 34%	Dogs - 621 or 38% Cats - 1060 or 47%	Dogs - 367 or 29% Cats - 507 or 46%	Dogs - 179 or 79% Cats - 174 or 83%
Animals to Rescue Groups	Dogs - 138 or 10% Cats - 300 or 28%	Dogs - 278 or 17% Cats - 601 or 27%	Dogs - 165 or 13% Cats - 497 or 45%	Data not kept as animals are transported to the Sydney site for Sydney based rescue groups to collect

|	Hawkesbury	Blacktown	Campbelltown	Blue Mountains RSPCA
Pre adoption Process	Recommend that all potential buyers meet the animals first and if they have a dog, to bring the dog to meet our dog	Recommend that all potential buyers meet the animals first and if they have a dog, to bring the dog to meet our dog	Recommend that all potential buyers meet the animals first and if they have a dog, to bring the dog to meet our dog	Recommend that all potential buyers meet the animals first and if they have a dog, to bring the dog to meet our dog
Percentage Dogs Euthanased	6%	8%	3%	9%
Percentage Cats Euthanased	35% - includes feral cats	39% - includes feral cats	4% - does not include feral cats	17%
Criteria for Euthanasia - Cats	Unweaned / unviable - and no foster carer or rescue available are euthanased on humane grounds Feral cats after assessment	Unweaned / unviable - and no foster carer or rescue available are euthanased on humane grounds Feral cats	Unweaned / unviable - and no foster carer or rescue available euthanased on humane grounds Feral cats	Unweaned / unviable - and no foster carer or rescue available are euthanased on humane grounds Feral cats - visual assessment on entry, most cases are placed on a 5 day fearful protocol to see if the cat appears re-homable
Criteria for Euthanasia - Dogs	Only declared dangerous dogs, restricted breeds, anti-social dogs or dogs as per veterinary advice or for humane reasons	Only declared dangerous dogs, restricted breeds, anti-social dogs or dogs as per veterinary advice or for humane reasons	Only declared dangerous dogs, restricted breeds, anti-social dogs or dogs as per veterinary advice or for humane reasons	Review of behavioural and medical issues to consider if: - Healthy - Treatable/ Rehabilitatable - Treatable/ Manageable - Untreatable/ Unmanageable

Table 2: Animal Management Comparison

5. CAPITAL WORKS

The Shelter has and is undergoing Capital Works improvements including:

- A new sign installed at the entry
- A misting system installed
- Completed new electrical works across the kennels
- Installation of a new roof

Plans for further Capital Works have been prepared and Council is investigating the possibility of obtaining a financial contribution from the councils currently being serviced by the Shelter.
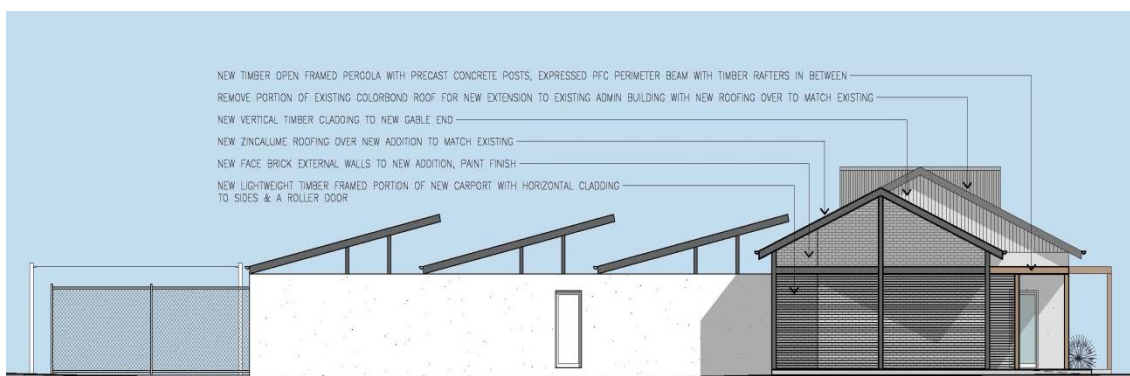
Proposed New Roof

6. SERVICE TO OTHER COUNCILS

6.1. Numbers of Animals

The review of the Shelter included assessing the fees and charges and updating the Service Agreement. Over several years Hawkesbury Companion Animal Shelter has been providing a service to Penrith City Council, Hills Council and Hornsby Council.

Table 3 below provides the numbers of cats and dogs that were brought in from each of the local government areas from 2014 to 2018.

CATS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL	TOTAL %
Hills	102	134	97	97	98	528	8.89
Hornsby	9	22	23	36	29	119	2.00
Penrith	712	751	708	629	628	3428	57.75
Hawkesbury	372	493	416	279	301	1861	31.35
TOTAL						5936	100.00
DOGS	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL	TOTAL %
Hills	226	155	160	160	139	840	10.02
Hornsby	26	54	44	43	22	189	2.25
Penrith	944	872	763	732	826	4137	49.35
Hawkesbury	899	736	630	485	467	3217	38.38
TOTAL						8383	100.00

Table 3: Numbers of Cats and Dogs 2014 - 2018

When assessing these numbers on a per capita basis between Penrith and Hawkesbury, with Penrith having an estimated population of 200,000 compared to Hawkesbury's 66,000, it demonstrates that there is a need to educate our community on effective pet ownership.

6.2. Fee Structure and Service Agreement

Under the current service Agreement the Hawkesbury Shelter only invoices the daily rate fees for a maximum of 10 days for non-microchipped animals and 20 days for animals that are microchipped and veterinary bills are capped at $150.

As a result of this agreement, any fees incurred for animals that are held for longer than 10 or 20 days or vet fees that cost more than $150, have been covered by Hawkesbury City Council, resulting in an annual operating loss.

As part of the review of the Hawkesbury Shelter the service Agreement has been updated and the fees have been amended as outlined in Table 4 below.

	Current Rate (ex GST)	Proposed Rate
Daily Rate	$14.06	$19.98
Euthanasia	$32.34	No change
Seizure Letter	$2.55	No change
Microchip	$7.15	No change
Vet fees	Capped at $150	Total vet bills covered

Table 4: Current and Revised Fees

It needs to be noted that the cost to Penrith Council resulted in a significant increase of around $200,000 per annum and as a result we have agreed to a cap of 25 days and $6,000 for vet fees. Staff felt comfortable with this based on the analysis of days the animals have been kept at the Shelter. In addition quarterly meetings have been established to enable the two councils to discuss any issues with the service provided and the costs incurred. It is also agrees that the fees will also be reviewed annually.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1. Consultation with Volunteers

Staff met with volunteers to listen to their issues, concerns and suggestions.

Table 5 below summarises the issues raised, and Council's response.

Issue	Response
Concern that many volunteers do not return as the initial experience is not well managed - need an induction, training, buddy program, clear roles and responsibilities, maybe a volunteer co-ordinator.	Volunteer Handbook and Position Description has been developed and finalised following consultation with volunteers. An Induction Program exists and will be reviewed to ensure better engagement and management of volunteers.
Need a behaviourist.	When required Council uses the services of a vet / behaviourist to assist in behavioural assessment.
Look at what other shelters do.	Visited Blacktown, Campbelltown and Blue Mountains shelters.
Need a Facebook page.	Will continue to use Council's Facebook page until Council is in a position to fund a resource. Currently investigating the opportunity for a contribution from the councils being serviced by Hawkesbury Shelter.
Improve signage.	Completed
Ensure the staff have the training they need.	Staff are trained in all areas as per their roles.
TAFE courses available that can be useful for volunteers.	Noted
Increase the opening hours on weekends.	This will be reviewed through natural staff attrition as Council is unable to change existing contracts.
Review the process for the use of red locks.	No longer using red locks.

Issue	Response
Improve the relationship between staff and volunteers.	This is an ongoing process and will be improved through better role clarity of staff and volunteers as a result of the use of Position Descriptions for volunteers.
Stagger the lunch hours so the Shelter does not have to close at lunchtime.	This time enables staff time to pick up materials for the Shelter, maintenance and exercising animals that are not as social.
Provide an information pack to people taking animals home so they have a plan of how to look after them, especially in the first few weeks. Look at what rescue groups provide.	The Adoption Kit has been reviewed and updated.
Give cats more time to settle down before they are assessed as cats take up to 24 hours to settle.	Agreed and being implemented.
Make sure volunteers only take out one dog at a time.	Agreed and being implemented.
Be clear about the tasks that volunteers can do - it has changed recently ie no longer allowed to wash out the cages or show the animals to the public. Now using volunteers to walk the dogs, hang out washing, look for fleas or worms or other ailments. Need to clarify what volunteers can offer and how to use them.	Agreed and developed a Position Description for volunteers that clarifies tasks for volunteers.
Review the 'Dog of the Week'.	Review completed and Council will continuously review.
Be aware of the pressure on the rescue groups if they think an animal is about to be euthanased.	The Shelter is aware of this.
Build relationships with more rescue groups.	This can form part of ongoing partnership development.

Issue	Response
Can the Shelter use enrichment programs eg KONG.	KONGs being implemented.
Look at the Pet Rescue site as an option to use.	This can be looked at as part of the ongoing use of social media and promotion of animals.
Ensure we make the most of the volunteers and see what skills they have that could be used.	Will identify skills via the initial interview process.

Table 5: Consultation with volunteers

7.2. Consultation with Rescue Groups

Staff met with rescue groups to listen to their issues, concerns and suggestions.

Table 6 below summarises the issues raised and Council's response

Issue	Response
Opening hours – need longer on weekends	This will be reviewed through natural staff attrition providing Council with the flexibility to employ staff on different hours.
Maintain the Shelter Open Days – be aware that these days also enable the rescue groups to raise funds.	This is noted however participation in broader Council events enables Council to promote the Shelter more broadly and rescue groups are invited to participate.
Would like to know the stats on the numbers of people coming on Sundays and dumping animals.	Very few animals are dumped at the Shelter on weekends.
Can they re-start using the space in front of the Shelter for meet and greets as they used to do?	The location for meet and greets will be assessed as part of the future Capital Works Program.
Be great if there could be a small room for cats to do meet and greets and have a chair for people to sit on.	Chair provided and the cannery will be assessed in the next stage of Capital Works.

Issue	Response
Need to improve the quality of the photos and maybe consider not just using the photo of when the dogs first arrive but take another one later on.	New camera has been purchased and photos have improved.
Use a technique that Blacktown uses – "*Do you know this dog – found at*?	There are concerns with people potentially stealing dogs as they know where the dog was found, especially if the dog is not microchipped.
Do a good summary of the dog qualities.	Review completed, changes implemented and gaining positive feedback.
There doesn't seem to be logic to the order of the photos.	The website has been amended to make it easier for lost animals and those for adoption.
Can we work with Hawkesbury Camera Club to get better photos?	The quality of photos have improved and Staff are also taking videos that have a greater impact in assisting in re-homing.
Introduce more free microchipping which is done during the open days.	Would require a budget.
Can we donate some microchips to rescue groups eg Welfare League asked for a donation.	Would require a budget. Council has also referred some requests to Council's Community Sponsorship Program
Look at how we can help the community more with cat traps eg a resident requests a trap which Council drops off but the resident needs help to set it up and sometimes the rescue groups end up having to help. If a cat is feral the rescue groups end up paying $60 to have it euthansed.	We do not want to encourage more trapping as there is a risk to other animals and the community if they are not used properly.
Are the impound fees too high?	The fees need to cover the level of vaccine that is administered ie dogs C5 and cats F4. This level is considered better practice. Blacktown only use a Par Vacc. Campbelltown only use a C3 for their dogs.

Issue	Response
Can the Shelter red flag community members to prevent them from taking more than one animal?	This is a welfare matter and not a Council matter.
Need to be careful that the Shelter is not having dangerous dogs re-homed.	Agreed and processes are in place to assess dogs.
Be good if rescue groups could have access to the microchip database as they can help with updating owners details.	This is a State Government controlled database.
There should be one fee for lifetime registration.	Registration fees are controlled by the State Government.
If people pay for de-sexing but they get it done elsewhere and able to show the certificate they should be reimbursed.	All animals that are sold are delivered by staff to our vets in our LGA for de-sexing. It is not proposed to change this practice.

Table 6: Consultation with rescue groups

8. WSROC STUDY

In 2017 WSROC undertook a study into animal holding facilities in the Greater Western Sydney Area to look at the long term sustainable animal holding solutions over the next 20 years.

The seven participating councils in the study were:

- Blacktown City Council
- City of Canterbury/Bankstown
- Cumberland Council
- The Hills Shire Council
- Fairfield City Council
- Liverpool City Council
- City of Parramatta Council.

Proximity to the Servicing Shelter

From the perspective of Rangers there is considerable transit time to and from the servicing shelter while for residents there was a level of inconvenience in being able to access the servicing shelter.

Public Perception and Lobbying

There was concern regarding the increasing pressure from animal welfare activists and concerned community members through such mediums as petitions or negative social media posts.

Staff Safety

There were two key concerns regarding safety - one being owners attempting to retrieve their animal and being verbally or physically abusive to staff and cyber bullying towards staff working at the Shelter.

Population Growth and Effect on Companion Animals

Councils were concerned with the impact of population increases in apartment numbers and how this may impact the numbers and types of animals being impounded.

Pet Registration

Concern was raised regarding the need to educate pet owners on the need to keep the pet registration details up to date.

Consistency with Definitions

Concern was raised regarding the lack of clarity in terminology across councils which creates a challenge in stating clear policies which can be used to engage and educate the community.

Having a Long Term Solution

All councils, except for Blacktown, lack a long term solution for the holding of animals.

In conclusion the report recommended that:

1. A network of overnight-stay facilities be located in each LGA

2. A region-wide capability based on three models are worthy of further consideration:

    a. A regional network comprising three centres located at Hawkesbury, Blacktown and Liverpool.

    b. Dual facilities based around the Blacktown and Hawkesbury sites.

    c. A centralised facility at Blacktown, this would in effect become a "super-centre" of sorts.

3. A number of non-infrastructure but complementary solutions be adopted at the regional and local levels.

Following the review of the Hawkesbury Shelter and reflecting on the common concerns within the study it is evident that many of the concerns are still relevant to Hawkesbury and work is underway to address some of the issues. The areas of key concern are public perception, staff safety, pet registration and a long term sustainable solution. In regards to these issues Council will:

- continue to work with the community to educate them on responsible pet ownership

- use social media to share stories of animals being re-homed

- implement a Code of Conduct for volunteers

- support staff that are experiencing cyber bullying

- amend the fees to cover the costs incurred from other councils using the Shelter service

- undertake Capital Works improvements for the long term sustainability of the Shelter and include safety by design.

9. IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN TO DATE

9.1. Summary of Improvements Undertaken in the Past 12 Months

Organisations should continually review their services and operations to ensure they are meeting community needs, addressing legislative changes and aiming for best practice.

As a result of this review the Shelter has undertaken a number of improvements following engagement with the Working Group, vets, volunteers and rescue groups. The following summarises some of the key initiatives:

- Introduction of kennel cards to assist in the summary of the dogs and their nature

- De-sexing pregnant cats to reduce the number of unwanted kittens

- 'Dog of the Week' promotion to assist in re-homing long term cats or dogs that are more challenging to re-home due to issues such as their age or breed

- Amending the fee for older dogs to assist in re-homing

- Use of "Fire Sales" when the Shelter is reaching capacity

- Increasing the use of social media

- Amending Council's website to enable easier searching for lost animals and animals for sale

- Undertaking a staff restructure to remove ranger activities and enabling a staff member to focus on re-homing and promotion

- Updating the standard disclaimer

- Amending the process for managing kitten season to reduce risk to animals, community and staff

- Undertaking community education programs such as "Have you checked your animals registration is up to date?", "It is flea season" and "de-sexing"

- Providing the revised Adoption Kit to assist the new owner in settling their new pet

- Implementing the Volunteer Handbook and position description for volunteers

10. FUTURE ACTIONS

Through the review process and consultation there are a number of actions that were identified and will be implemented over time including:

- Investigating a de-sexing initiative that Campbelltown Shelter are participating in

- Continuing to use social media and seeking opportunities to fund a social media resource for the Shelter

- Undertaking promotion campaigns to educate the community, promote the Shelter and share good news stories of animals that have been re-homed

- Implementing further Capital Works improvements

- Collecting statistics on the number of people coming in on weekends

- Reviewing the Shelter Induction Program to ensure better engagement and management of volunteers

- Investigating the option of closing the Shelter on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.