



OFFICIAL

City and Environment Directorate

Meeting Brief

To:	Minister for City and Government Services	Tracking No.: C2025/01480
Date:	18/02/2026	
Through:	Deputy Director-General, Transport and City Services	
From:	Executive Group Manager, Territory and Business Services	
Meeting Date and Time:	Monday, 23 February – 11.00-11.30am	
Location:	Legislative Assembly, Minister Cheyne's Office	
Subject:	Meeting with Michelle Robertson, CEO of RSPCA ACT	

Purpose of the meeting

To discuss insights and to provide an update on the organisation's performance against the Service Funding Agreement for the 2024/25 financial year.

Minister's Feedback

Purpose of the meeting:	To discuss insights and to provide an update on the organisation's last financial year.
Attendees:	Michelle Robertson, CEO, RSPCA ACT Personal information
Directorate Rep requested:	N/A
Day / date:	Monday, 23 February 2026
Time:	11.00-11.30am
Venue:	Minister's Office
Background:	RSPCA ACT and the ACT government have a Service Funding Agreement (SFA) in place. This agreement see RSPCA provide animal management and animal welfare inspectorate services to the Territory.
Discussion:	Final stages of drafting of deed for the grant for the design of a new purpose-built facility for the RSPCA ACT. To assist in discussing the RSPCA's performance over the past financial year, the Service Funding Report for the 2024/25 financial year is at <u>Attachment A</u>
Consultation internal:	N/A
Cross directorate:	N/A
External:	N/A
Media implications:	N/A
Speech:	N/A



ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED

1.1 Topic

- Discussion will likely focus on RSPCA ACT's performance in the 2024/25 financial year in relation to the Service Funding Agreement (SFA).

1.2 Policy position

- The SFA for 2024/25 set aside \$962,638.60 GST inclusive for the RSPCA ACT.
- This arrangement sees RSPCA deliver:
 - animal welfare services under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* (the AW Act). Under this arrangement RSPCA ACT will employ suitably trained staff to be appointed as inspectors under the AW Act.
 - services as a provider under the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* (the DA Act), this includes cat management services where they provide temporary care for cats seized by the Territory, and stray or roaming cats received from the public.
 - dog management services by accepting stray dogs from the Territory and the public.
 - rehabilitate all animals with a view of rehoming them where possible. (depending on capacity requirements, dogs may be transferred between DAS and RSPCA ACT).
- In the 2024/25 financial year, RSPCA ACT:
 - received 1152 cats from the public and 142 from the Territory.
 - returned 120 cats to owners and euthanised 54 for behavioural or health reasons.
 - received 184 dogs from the public and 75 from the Territory.
 - returned 109 dogs to their owners.
- In the 2024/25 financial year, the Inspectorate:
 - received 744 reports that would have constituted an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*.
 - made 1154 enquiries to gauge the severity and validity of the report.
 - received 3427 phone calls during the reporting period with those calls being actioned in accordance with organisation priorities.
 - progressed 5 matters to prosecution.

1.3 Background

- Domestic Animal Services works in close partnership with RSPCA ACT to investigate and prosecute serious cases of animal cruelty or neglect. This collaboration ensures that significant welfare breaches are thoroughly investigated and appropriately enforced under the Animal Welfare legislation.

- 159 animal welfare complaints have been reported to Domestic Animal Services this financial year (2025-26). This is compared with 219 for FY2024-25, 165 for FY2023-24 and 137 for FY2022-23. As of February 2026, DAS has introduced incident sub-types for animal welfare matters recorded on their case management system; these include appropriate care, cruelty/neglect, animal in vehicle, etc.
- In the 2024–25 financial year, several successful prosecutions resulted in penalties and prohibitions on animal ownership. These outcomes reflect the ACT Government’s commitment to preventing future harm and ensuring individuals who pose a risk to animals are restricted from owning them.
- DAS administers animal welfare licences and permits for regulated activities, including boarding establishments and pet shops. Compliance activities include routine inspections, proactive monitoring, and follow-up investigations where concerns are raised by the community.
- Over the past 12 months, DAS has been conducting an extensive investigation into a large overnight boarding establishment following community reports of animal welfare concerns. The Animal Welfare Authority—administered through DAS—and the ACT Chief Veterinary Officer have worked with the licensee to identify and rectify areas of non-compliance to ensure the facility meets required standards.
- Enforcement action is supported by a risk-based regulatory approach. DAS prioritises facilities and operators with higher welfare risks and takes a graduated enforcement approach, ranging from education and improvement notices to prosecution where serious or repeated non-compliance is identified.

2.1 Topic

- The CEO of RSPCA ACT may also wish to discuss progress in relation to the construction of the new facility to be located at Pialligo.

2.2 Policy position

- Deed to provision RSPCA ACT with \$2M is in the final stages of drafting/negotiation and is expected to be signed shortly.

3.1 Topic

- In meetings with Domestic Animal Services, RSPCA ACT has expressed concern with the effectiveness of the ACT Government’s current approach to management of unowned and feral cats, with the CEO noting the need for renewed strategic focus and stronger partnership.

3.2 Policy position

- The ACT Government continues to implement the ACT Cat Plan, with actions since its introduction including rolling out cat registration, new containment rules for cats born after 1 July 2022, improving guidance for owners, and conducting sustained public education on responsible cat ownership and roaming impacts.
- Unowned cat management remains a significant challenge, as colonies are often sustained by residents feeding roaming cats, leading to ongoing breeding cycles; in response, DAS has increased targeted education in hotspot areas and worked with ACT Housing and other partners to discourage feeding behaviours.

- Trapping unowned cats is labour-intensive and subject to strict animal-welfare requirements, and DAS is not resourced for large-scale trapping; to support the community, DAS has provided clear advice on lawful trapping options, facilitated access to traps through external providers, and ensured that contained cats can be transported to RSPCA ACT.

3.3 Background

- The top areas of concern continue to be large scale cat hoarding in private residences, unmanaged cat colonies, wildlife predation by feral and unowned cats, uncontrolled breeding leading to population growth, and ongoing challenges in enforcing voluntary containment requirements in non-containment areas.
- Improving desexing rates remains a key strategy to reduce unwanted cats. A Territory-wide desexing assistance model, delivered with veterinary partners and community organisations, would support owners and carers to meet welfare responsibilities and help reduce overpopulation, euthanasia, and disease spread. The Companion Animal Care Grants are already supporting subsidised cat desexing initiatives and is leveraged as part of a coordinated model.
- Constraints on rehoming capacity and adoptability (e.g., behaviour, health, socialisation) have reduced the rate at which community groups can desex and place semi-owned and unowned cats, leading some groups to continue returning desexed cats to location when adoption is not immediately feasible.
- Domestic Animal Services maintains operational working relationships with RSPCA ACT, CPR and CSCA, particularly in relation to rescue, desexing and rehoming activities. These relationships enable the delivery of Trap–Neuter–Adopt (TNA) approaches and provide critical community capacity for managing semi owned and unowned cats.
- Cat hoarding in private residences continues to present significant welfare and operational challenges, with Domestic Animal Services, RSPCA ACT and rescue groups jointly managing several complex cases—some involving up to 150 cats. These situations place considerable strain on finite community and government resources, as groups can only accept limited numbers of cats at a time, allowing new litters to be born before the remaining cats can be removed. In such cases, humane euthanasia may need to be considered to protect animal welfare, prevent uncontrolled breeding, and ensure resources can be directed toward adoptable animals.
- Hoarding cases are complex and often involve overlapping mental-health, welfare, and environmental risks, which can create unsafe living conditions, animal-welfare concerns, and significant impacts on neighbours; these situations require careful, staged intervention across multiple agencies.
- The ACT Government responds to severe hoarding through a coordinated, cross-agency framework, including the Hoarding Case Management Group, ACT Health, Housing ACT, RSPCA ACT and City Services, ensuring both the resident’s wellbeing and public safety are addressed in a structured and supportive way.
- Interventions follow an “engage, educate, enforce” approach, with early engagement, support services and voluntary compliance encouraged first, and regulatory tools—such as animal-welfare enforcement or court-approved abatement—used only when risks cannot be mitigated.



4.1 Topic

- In meetings with Domestic Animal Services, RSPCA ACT has expressed a renewed strategic focus and stronger partnership concerning illegal breeding and desexing compliance for owners of dogs and cats.

4.2 Policy position

- DAS continues to treat illegal breeding complaints as a priority. Rangers investigated several illegal breeding matters in the last financial year and will continue to seize dogs and puppies where unlawful breeding is identified, subject to operational capacity.
- The ACT Government continues to partner with the National Desexing Network (NDN) to support affordable desexing for pet owners in financial hardship. The NDN provides a national referral system linking eligible owners with participating veterinarians who offer reduced-cost desexing to improve pet health and reduce unplanned litters.
- DAS also provides heavily subsidised desexing vouchers for dogs through the RSPCA ACT. These vouchers significantly reduce the overall procedure cost for owners, with DAS covering the gap fee to encourage responsible pet ownership and reduce the risk of accidental or backyard breeding.
- Community education on responsible breeding practices remains a key focus for DAS. Public messaging promotes compliance with breeding and registration laws, highlights the risks of unregulated breeding, and encourages early desexing to prevent unwanted litters.
- Enforcement activity is supported by proactive monitoring and intelligence-gathering. DAS continues to respond to community reports, online advertising activity, and unregistered breeding operations to ensure compliance with the Domestic Animals Act.

RSPCA ACT Report for the Service Funding Agreement

Report for 1st July 2024 – 30 June 2025

Prepared by RSPCA ACT

a. The number of animals seized under the Animal Welfare ACT 1992

1. 9 animals seized under 81A(a) to (c) and/or s85(2) via 85(1)((a) to (c).
2. Animal types:

Dogs	8	
Puppies	1	
TOTAL	9	

The inspectorate continues to prioritise cases warranting the removal of animals from their home environment and aims to continue this approach when appropriate.

While there has been an increase in the number of animals removed compared to previous reporting periods, the vast majority were done so with the cooperation of the animal owners.

Having this cooperation allows for the smooth transition of the animal's rehabilitation, homing, and also to maintain a rapport with the animal owners thus supporting better welfare for other owned animals or a reduced need for further intervention by inspectors.

3. Number of animals destroyed under the Act: 0. (*relates only to Inspector Seized Animals*)
4. Number of entries into premises under section 81 of the Act: 1

b. Stray dogs and cats

1. Number of animals received from the public:

Felines	1152
Canines	184
TOTAL	1336

2. Number of animals received from the Territory:

Felines	142	
Canines	75	Note: includes DAS seized animals
Other species	17	
TOTAL	234	

c. Cats and dogs housed

1. For stray cats and dogs received from the public or the Territory, the number of days housed against legislative compliance period for the relevant Acts:

Felines	Within 7 days*
Canines	7 days*

* Denotes the minimum days to be held as 'stray hold' to meet compliance requirements.

Note: animals are released back to owners if claimed before stray hold is up, and once stray hold period has expired, unclaimed animals fall under ownership of RSPCA ACT.

2. Number of days held for prosecution related matters*:

Felines	average 16 days
Canines	average 0 days

* For animals seized within this reporting period.

3. Number of dogs transferred to DAS: 3
(Note: includes DAS seized animals returned to DAS)

d. Animals released

1. Number of **stray** dogs and cats returned to owner:

Felines	120
Canines	109
TOTAL	229

2. The average number of days housed until returned to the owner: 1 day

e. Euthanasiation

Number of pest animals euthanised	19
Number of cats deemed feral/unsocialised and euthanised	54
TOTAL	73

f. Inspectorate service

1. Number of enquires/ investigations received by the inspectorate:

The Inspectorate received 744 reports that would have constituted an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 1992, throughout the financial period.

This was a reduction from previous years.

There has been an increase concerning animals being kept in multi-story apartment complexes.

1154 enquires were made by inspectors pertaining to the reports to gauge the severity and validity of the report.

3427 phone calls were received by the Inspectorate during the reporting period with those calls being actioned in accordance with organisation priorities.

2. Summary of written / verbal directions:

Inspectors continued to approach reports in a consistent manner with education being at the forefront. During the reporting period 6 verbal directions were provided with no noncompliance being detected. This resulted in no requirement for formal written directions to be issued.

3. ACT Civil Administrative Tribunal Matters:

One application of appeal against a notice pursuant to s86C to rehome an animal was received. This appeal was later vacated by the applicant.

4. Number of prosecutions commenced:

5

5. Summary of Court Outcomes:

The matters before the court are yet to be finalised.

The 5 matters (prosecutions) are at various stages before the court. It is anticipated that they will be completed in November 2025 at this stage, as one is set for a contested hearing, and others are yet to have pleas entered or sentencing carried out.

g. General Statement - Inspectorate

While the Inspectorate continued to receive a considerable volume of calls for assistance, the number of confirmed reports of animal cruelty has somewhat declined.

One of the reasons could be focussed internal capturing of calls and differentiating from stray animals or nuisance calls.

There are still many reports concerning stray cats and other nuisance animal (barking, attacking etc) matters that fall outside the Inspectorates remit coming through to RSPCA ACT. These calls are not currently recorded but referred to DAS. There may be opportunity for more efficiency in dealing these calls.

The recent and unexpected cessation of the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) from representing the Inspectorate in court, has created some uncertainty in commencing legal proceedings against animal cruelty offenders.

The recent discontinuation of Domestic Animal Services (DAS) to transport animals connected to vulnerable pet owners who require assistance with emergency boarding housing for their animals, will have an impact on RSPCA ACT Inspectorate filling this gap and the sustainability thereof will be reviewed.

The Inspectorate remains committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Service Funding Agreement and will continue to provide assistance where feasible with its available resources.

h. Additional information

# animals at C/H status on 30 June	Total = 0
Includes animals in foster. Does not include DAS C/H animals	

In addition, we also included the 'Length of Stay' (LOS) for animals who were or are in care during this reporting period, including those animals held at Court Hold status on behalf of Domestic Animal Services. Their status therefore:

- changed to or from Court Held in the July-December period,
- or are/were still in care as at 30 June 2025,
- indicates the total LOS at that status, for those animals who were still in care during this reporting period, but who came in before July 1 2024.

Days at court hold status	# Animals
0-30	9
31-60	
61-100	
100+	

This information was not requested, but we wanted to provide it as we think it is useful to capture.