

Should animal management services be contracted out?

(From an outside contractor perspective)

Graeme Smith

The Lost Dogs' Home has been a private service provider for animal management services for local government since 1996. Including pound services, after hours services and database services we now have contracts with 18 Victorian Councils. Under Victorian competitive tendering legislation we were successful in approximately one third of the services that were tendered out by Councils. It has been an outstanding achievement that has delivered professionalism, cultural change, specialisation, training, quality control and innovation to the provision of animal management services for local government. We are seen by the community and the Councils as 'animal problem solvers'.

We provide the services using a quality management system that is accredited under ISO9001/2000. The databases we utilise are simple, efficient and user friendly. Our contracts are benchmarked internally and the services are subject to monthly review by our Contract Managers. Our emphasis has been on improving communication, increasing compliance and training staff. In the future we will be benchmarking our services with Councils or developing partnerships with existing business units to continuously improve the delivery of animal management services.

The Lost Dogs' Home is well positioned to provide animal management services for Councils. We are a pragmatic and innovative, animal welfare organisation and these services are very much a component of our core business.

It fits in with our mission to serve the community and enhance the welfare of dogs and cats by alleviating animal suffering and reducing the number of lost, injured and unwanted animals.

This mission is fulfilled by providing

shelter, animal management services and veterinary services — in a quality environment.

We will further fulfil this mission by education of the public and advocacy of policy at all Government levels.

The Home receives minimal funding from the State or Federal Government and relies on donations, legacies, shelter fees, council contract service fees and veterinary clinic income for funds to provide the above services for the community.

HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES OF THE LOST DOGS' HOME

- The Lost Dogs' Home is currently the third largest animal shelter in Australia, handling more than 20,000 companion animals during 2000/2001. Activities include:

The acceptance of unwanted pets for re-housing when possible and humane euthanasia when necessary.

A private veterinary clinic for the general public.

A 24 hour per day, 7 days a week ambulance service for sick and injured animals including home calls for pets.

A lost and found animal information service.

A subsidised micro-chipping identification service for companion animals including lifetime registration via the National Pet Register. Micro-chipping days are regularly held in the Melbourne metropolitan area and more recently in New South Wales.

Trapping and collection of stray and feral cats.

A 24 hour per day, 7 day per week National Pet Register service.

- We have been successful in winning contracts to provide Animal Management Services for six municipalities throughout the state. These include:

Providing the full range of animal control, dog and cat registration services, pound and after hours services for the municipalities of Hobsons Bay, Darebin, Port Phillip, Melbourne and Glen Eira

Animal control, livestock pound management, dog and cat registration services and after hours service for Greater Bendigo

(We also provided Animal Control and Pound Services for the Shire of South Gippsland — but this contract was not renewed after three years).

- We have contracts for Pound services with the municipalities of Kingston, Greater Dandenong, Wyndham, Brimbank, Bayside, Moreland (dogs), Moonee Valley, Yarra, Cardinia, Frankston and Maribyrnong.
- We offer after hours emergency services for Frankston, Moreland (dogs), Moonee Valley, and Yarra.
- We are responsible for the mail out of animal registration forms and tags for the City of Knox.

We therefore have a relationship with 18 Victorian Councils. (Approximately 20% of all Victorian Councils). All of the above contracts were awarded under Competitive Tendering legislation. (see below)

COMPULSORY COMPETITIVE TENDERING AND ‘BEST VALUE’ LEGISLATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN VICTORIA

The Liberal State Government in 1995 introduced competitive tendering legislation (CCT). Following proclamation of this legislation the Management and the Board at The Lost Dogs’ Home seized the opportunity to tender for animal management services that had been previously the traditional function of councils.

These services broadly covered the administration of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994*, its Regulations and Codes of Practice and the Local Laws for animal control for the specific councils.

The Lost Dogs’ Home has been successful in obtaining a number of animal management contracts (see previous section) and has employed over twenty Animal Control Officers over the past five years to administer the contract specifications for the relevant councils.

During this period staff at The Home have provided a quality service for these councils as evidenced by:

- the renewal and/or extension of many of the contracts;
- the Council Contract Performance Reports and Analysis of Workload Indicators (see Case Studies section); and
- the letters of support from senior council officers and professionals within the communities serviced.

With the election of the State Labor Government in 1999, the Local Government (Best Value Principles) Bill subsequently replaced the Competitive Tendering legislation.

Following the enactment of this Act all Councils must ensure that their services:

1. Provide the best possible quality and value for money.
2. Are responsive to community needs.
3. Are accessible to the people they are intended for.
4. Show continuous improvement.
5. Are subject to regular community consultation.
6. Are being compared to best value principles and results are reported to the community on a regular basis.

Councils must develop quality and cost standards for all of their services and benchmark them against the best on offer in both the public and private sectors. Other key factors in service standards development include community expectations and values and the balance between affordability and accessibility of the services to the community.

Review outcomes must be completed and implemented by 2005 and all services will be subject to a best value review every five years.

The activities of The Lost Dogs' Home in this field have resulted in a number of significant improvements in animal management services provision.

We have been able to introduce:

- professionalism;
- increased training opportunities;
- specialisation;
- cultural change;
- economies of scale;
- benchmarking;
- innovation; and
- quality management systems.

1. PROFESSIONALISM

Our staff are selected through Assessment Centres. We have consulted with Occupational Services Pty Ltd to develop a selection system that provides a more informed and less biased approach than the normal job interview. The Assessment Centres for Animal Control Officers include a competency based interview, a situational assessment and a personality profile. Over the past four years we have continued to improve the selection process so that we are now assessing for the following competencies:

- (i) specialist knowledge;
- (ii) relationship development and teamwork;
- (iii) conflict management and negotiation skills;
- (iv) communication;
- (v) professionalism;
- (vi) conscientiousness;
- (vii) flexibility;
- (viii) emotional resilience;
- (ix) decision making.

We also provide our staff with further training and professional development which increases self esteem and morale.

2. TRAINING

Since my appointment in April 1986 The Home's education and training policy has been to foster staff training programs. Most members of staff have graduated from accredited tertiary and/or TAFE courses and undertake ongoing professional development via seminars and short courses.

In 1998 The Lost Dogs' Home appointed an Education and Training Officer Dr David Berry, because, following the successful tendering for a number of council Animal Management Services contracts, the Home needed not only to employ Animal Control Officers but also to provide appropriate training for them.

At this time there was no suitable Animal Control Officer training course in Victoria.

The role of the Education and Training Officer was initially to perform an Australia-wide curriculum search for suitably accredited courses that would provide the appropriate training for Animal Control Officers at The Home specifically and for Victoria in general.

One such course was found — the Certificate III and IV in Local Government (Animal Management) which was accredited in Queensland and being offered by Ithaca College of TAFE in Brisbane as an external course.

The Lost Dogs' Home made formal representations to Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) requesting that NMIT seek recurrent funding and place the course on their scope of registration to be conducted at the Collingwood Campus in 1999.

The first intake for the 12-month part-time Certificate III course occurred in February 1999 with thirteen students enrolling and eight graduating at the end of that year. Since then there have been two further intakes for the Certificate III course: in July 1999 (eighteen enrolled and fifteen graduated) and February 2001 (19 enrolled and ongoing).

It must be noted that The Lost Dogs' Home Education and Training Officer coordinated and taught the Animal Industry-related modules for the first intake of Animal Control Officers and has taught modules (Occupational Health and Safety and Work Environment) to the other two groups of students.

In 2000/2001 all staff employed as Animal Control Officers at the Lost Dogs' Home have either graduated from, or are being trained in, the Certificate III in Local Government (Animal Management) course at NMIT.

The table (below) gives an interesting summary of the work origins and sponsorship details for the total number of students participating in the course up until the present.

The inescapable conclusion is that The Lost Dogs' Home (in partnership with NMIT) has been proactive and innovative in setting-up accredited Animal Control Officer training programs in Victoria.

3. SPECIALISATION

Our staff are specialising in animal management. They are therefore handling more animal management cases than officers at Councils where multi-skilling is practised. Hence they are better equipped to handle animal problems compared to officers who may be dealing with Local Laws, Fire Prevention, Traffic and many other laws that may divert their attention and interest from Animal Control.

4. CULTURAL CHANGE

The Home has been able to provide animal management services that are perceived by Councils and the community as animal problem solutions. In many cases we are the 'go betweens'. We are specialist contractors or animal management service providers. We are able to provide specialist advice to Councils but we are currently not permitted to prosecute individual owners. Our background in service delivery and animal welfare results in an improved delivery of service. For instance we have seen a gradual improvement in the way most Councils respond to injured animals and other emergencies.

5. ECONOMIES OF SCALE

As we have a number of Council Contracts we are able to shift staff from one Council to another. This is particularly useful in the provision of after hours services. We provide after hours for eight Councils in the greater Melbourne region. We use one vehicle and one ambulance driver. If it gets very busy we are able to call in additional staff. In the past eight Councils would have had eight staff on standby with eight separate vehicles. This new way of doing business is obviously a huge saving for the Councils involved.

6. BENCHMARKING

Owing to the fact that we are service providers for six different councils we are able to benchmark one Council against another. We examine the requests for service against the number of staff employed. We look at compliance for cat and dog registration. We compare number of cats and dogs impounded, response times, after hours calls etc. If a council is falling behind in terms of compliance rates there are some aberrations (ie more dog attacks, more wild cats etc), we will provide extra resources in the form of additional staff or change work practices so that the standard of service is raised compared to our leading Councils.

The following graphs are examples of our benchmarking. **Note** the statistics cover year 2000 figures. The registration numbers are for the registration year 2000/2001. The abbreviations are:

D Darebin

HB Hobsons Bay

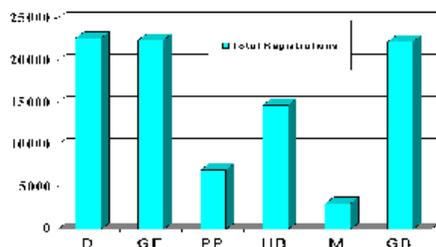
GE Glen Eira

M Melbourne

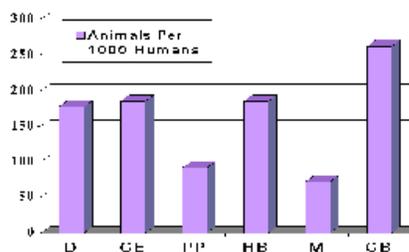
PP Port Phillip

GB Greater Bendigo

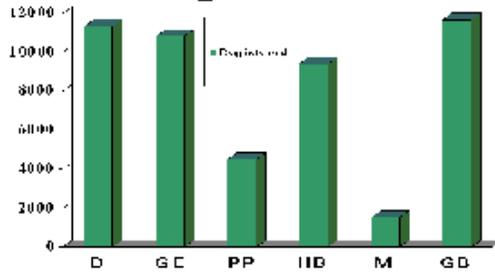
Total Animal Registrations



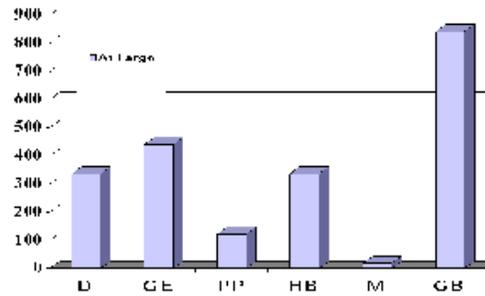
Animals Per 1000 Humans



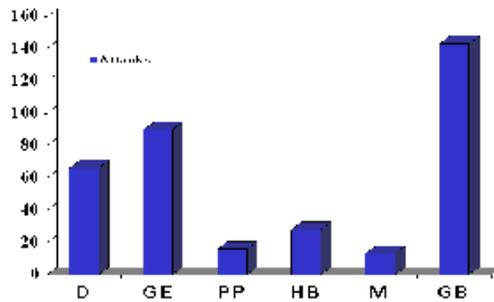
Number Of Dog Registrations



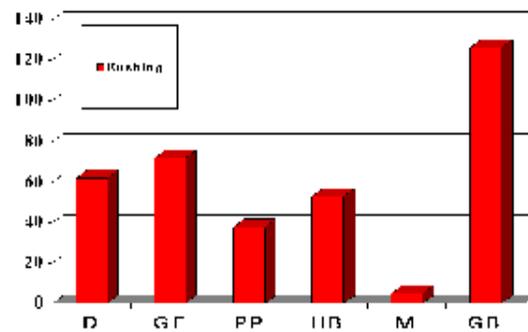
Dogs At Large



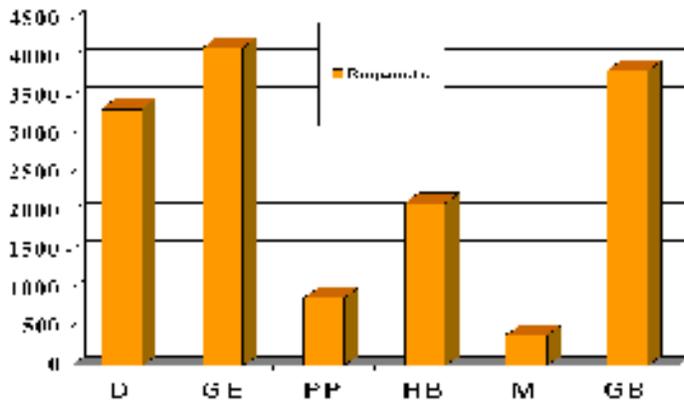
Dog Attacks



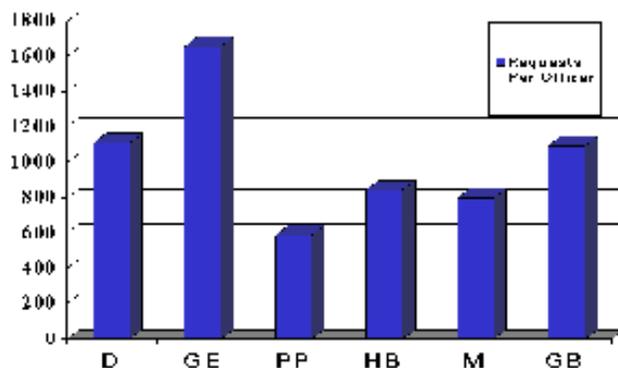
Dogs Rushing



Requests For Service



Requests Per Officer



7. INNOVATION

The Home has developed a number of innovations in the animal management area. For instance we were the first organisation to put Council telephone numbers on cat and dog registration tags. We have developed cat and dog registration databases that are simple, efficient and user friendly for our staff and the Councils. The databases include pet names, which can be useful when tracking down a registered animal where the owner refuses to provide their name and address.

In the City of Hobsons Bay and the City of Melbourne we accept payments via the Internet. Approximately 5% of the total payments in 2001 were Internet payments. In the City of Port Phillip we were involved in a dog poo management program where we even threatened to DNA test dog poo which generated an enormous amount of publicity (TV, Radio and newspapers).

We were awarded the year 2000 Victoria Public Relations Institute of Australia award for Government and Community campaigns. We were highly commended in the same year for the National Public Relations Awards for Community Communication.

8. QUALITY SYSTEM WORK PROCESSES

Of the fourteen work processes in The Lost Dogs' Home Quality Management System, seven are directly referable to the provision of Animal Management Services to councils as per council contract specifications. These work processes are:

- Animal Control (LDH009);
- Training (LDH005);
- After Hours Telephone Service (LDH013);
- Animal Registration (LDH019);
- Document Register (LDH004);
- Planning Process (LDH010); and
- Review and Improvement (LDH012).

The work process flowcharts provide a detailed template of:

- the purpose and objectives for each process;
- the staff members involved in the process;
- the steps involved in performing the process — these should be followed by all staff members involved in performing the task;
- notes, points of clarification and reference to controlled and/or attached documents is located on the right-hand side of each flowchart.
- a list of Performance Indicators that are measurements of the effectiveness of the work process performance. For example the Animal Control Key Performance Indicators are:
 - compliance with council specifications as per animal management contracts
 - monthly council reports — accurate documentation of work completed
 - customer (council and individual) satisfaction surveys

By consulting with and training staff in the use of the work process flowcharts in the workplace and measuring the effectiveness of these processes via the Key Performance Indicators, The Lost Dogs' Home management is assured that the Quality Management System is being adhered to.

The conclusion is that The Lost Dogs' Home can properly deliver, control and account for the functionality, quality, time effectiveness and cost of the Animal Management Services provided for councils.

CASE STUDIES

By citing two case studies it can be demonstrated that the innovations of Quality Management System accreditation and emphasis on Animal Control Officer training can be translated into positive and measurable outcomes as well as a high degree of customer satisfaction.

City of Greater Bendigo

- The City of Greater Bendigo is located in Central Victoria and encompasses Bendigo and suburbs, Heathcote and a rural area radiating 50 km out from Bendigo. The population is approximately 90,000 people.
- The Lost Dogs' Home was successful in obtaining the Animal Management Services contract for Bendigo in 1997 and a 12-month extension to the contract was recently granted.
- Three of the five Animal Control Officers working in Bendigo have graduated from the Certificate III in Local Government (Animal Management) course at NMIT and the other two officers are doing the course this year

Evidence of Success in Animal Management Service Provision in the City of Greater Bendigo:

- Monthly Contract Performance Reports and Ratings for the Provision of Animal Control Services By The Lost Dogs' Home to the City of Greater Bendigo.

→ During 1997, in the early stages of providing Animal Control Services for Bendigo, The Lost Dogs' Home rated 3 on a scale out of 10.

→ However over the past 3 years the ratings, based on compliance and quality service provision have risen from 6.4 (Satisfactory Quality) in January 1998 to straight 10s (Very Good Quality/Full compliance/All timelines met) for the past 10 months.

→ There has only been one month in the last 20 where the Home rated less than 10 and that rating was a 9.5!

- The table below illustrates that our Animal Control Officers have been vigorous in their administration of the Act and Local Laws (Animal Control) in Bendigo as evidenced by the increased recording of barking dogs, dog attacks and animals impounded over the past three years compared to the contract specification workload indicators in the original contract tender document of 1996/97.

Year	Barking Dogs	Dog Attacks	Dogs Impounded	Cats Impounded	Livestock Impounded
1996/97 (Workload Indicators)	250	100	900	440	50
1997/98	342	150	1040	359	263
1998/99	338	129	1161	568	237
1999/2000	392	169	1253	603	217

Hobsons Bay City Council

- Hobsons Bay City Council is located in metropolitan Melbourne and comprises the suburbs of Williamstown, Altona, Altona Meadows, Newport, Spotswood and Laverton. It has the Yarra River as its eastern border and Port Phillip Bay as its southern boundary. The population is approximately 85,000 people.
- The Lost Dogs' Home was successful in obtaining the Animal Management Services contract for Hobsons Bay in 1996 and renewing the contract in 1999.
- One of the three Animal Control Officers working in Hobsons Bay have graduated from the Certificate III in Local Government (Animal Management) course at NMIT and the other two officers are doing the course this year.

Evidence of Success in Animal Management Service Provision in Hobsons Bay City Council:

Animal Registration Figures

If a dog and/or cat is identified and registered then most of the work in animal management for local government has already been done. The table below and graph over the page demonstrate an increase of over 25% in animal registrations in Hobsons Bay over the four years (April to March) of 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/00 and 2000/01. These results demonstrate staff commitment and action in administration of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act* and the promotion of Responsible Pet Ownership in Hobsons Bay.

Year	Number of Animals Registered	% Increase per annum
1997/98	11,473	N/A
1998/99	12,393	8%
1999/2000	13,308	7.4%
2000/2001	14,673	10%

- There was an increase of almost 80% in the number of hours officers spent patrolling the foreshores, beaches; parks and public open spaces within Hobsons Bay over the four-year period (from 865 hours in 1996/97 to 1543 hours in 2000/2001).

- During the last two years there has been community compliance with the Act and animal management Local Laws of 94.4% in 1999/2000 and 96.4% in 2000/01.

CONCLUSION

The Lost Dogs' Home welcomed the opportunity to tender for Animal Management Service provision for Councils under Victorian legislation in the 1990s and introduction of Best Value Principles to the provision of Animal Management Services by Councils as per the Local Government (best Value Principles) Bill of 1999.

The Home has subscribed to the underlying principles and practice of Best Value since we entered the field in the 1990s and, in so doing, we are regarded as the innovators for Animal Management Service delivery in Victoria.

We strongly believe that we properly deliver, control and account for the major outcomes of function, quality, time and cost for the animal management services we provide for councils because our business is effective, efficient and accountable.

We see our future in benchmarking our services with Councils or developing partnerships with existing business units to continue to improve the delivery of Animal Management Services in Australia. We have been successful in radically changing the Animal Management culture in the State of Victoria. We would very much welcome the opportunity to introduce improved work practices, cultural change, professionalism, quality and training to these services in other areas of Victoria and to the other states and territories.

Our approach and direction for the next few years will be to use customer satisfaction surveys to further improve the delivery of Animal Management Services. This approach fits in perfectly with Best Value legislation which is about measuring outputs.

It also fits in with the new standard (ISO 9001/2000) which has more emphasis on measuring and evaluating customer satisfaction. As a result of our activities in the field of Animal Management for Local Government the animal management landscape has been irreversibly changed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Graeme Smith has been involved in the animal welfare field for the past twenty years. He graduated as a Veterinarian from the University of Melbourne in 1976. For five years he worked in small animal veterinary practice. In 1981 he established the RSPCA Veterinary Clinic at East Burwood, Victoria. In 1986 he joined The Lost Dogs' Home in North Melbourne as the General Manager/CEO. He is now the Managing Director of the Home and has overseen the transformation of an organisation that cared for stray and unwanted dogs to an externally accredited quality managed organisation with a budget of \$4 million and employing more than 80 staff. The Home has contracts with 18 Victorian Councils. It also operates the National Pet Register with more than 350,000 Australian pets on its database. Graeme has also been responsible for establishing an animal control officer course in Victoria. Since 1990 he has been a member of the state government's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee.

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