



# Review of Ranger Services

## Alignment to Corporate Objectives

Strategic Action 1.1.4 of the Plan is to “Review level of Ranger services” in the 2023/2024 financial year. Another actions which may be impacted by this review and potential amendments to current service provision is Action 4.2.5 “Review future sustainability of the Shire”.

The Strategic Community & Corporate Business Plan 2022-2032 indicates that Dog Control was in the five lowest community priorities according to the results of a community survey conducted in 2022.

## Current Level of Service

The Shire has engaged a contract Ranger service to visit the district on a weekly basis since July 2014. They also visit on occasions when matters cannot wait for a weekly visit, eg when there is a dog attack, if there is an animal welfare situation etc.

The Ranger responds to complaints regarding dogs and cats and roaming animals. They carry out inspections of properties, trap feral cats and educate residents on their requirements regarding registration and micro chipping.

The Ranger also carries out an annual inspection of properties within the townsites to determine compliance with the Firebreak Notice.

A number of dogs, puppies and cats are surrendered/seized and rehomed each year by the contract Ranger service through the A1 Wheatbelt Dog Rescue, a non-profit organisation run by the contract Ranger service.

## Statistics

There are current 92 registered dogs and 43 registered cats within the Shire of Trayning.

The number of complaints received that have been forwarded to Ranger Services each year are typically low, ie:

2017	1
2018	1
2019	0
2020	0
2021	1
2022	1
2023	7

## Community Satisfaction

The 2023 Community Needs and Satisfaction Survey included a question asking participants with the level of satisfaction with Ranger Services. There were nine responses to say satisfaction was either Excellent or Good, with three Satisfactory and only one Poor.

There was another questions relating to how important Dog Control was liveability in the Shire. Ten respondents said it was Very Important or Important, with four Somewhat Important and one Least Important.

## Cost of Service

The Contract Ranger charges the Shire an hourly rate which includes travel for visits to the Shire. Weekly visits are carried out on the same day as a number of other Shires in the area, reducing travel time. Urgent visits outside the usual rotation may incur a higher travel component if the costs can't be shared with other jobs.

The Shire receives a small amount of income from the registration of cats and dogs, as well as fines and penalties. These fees are set by legislation and are a lot less than the costs involved.

The direct costs of the Ranger Service over the past five years, as well as fees and charges received have been:

Year	Ranger Cost	Other Costs	Registration Fees	Fines	Operating Loss
2015/2016	13,847	1,409	2,142	0	13,114
2016/2017	12,963	40	1,320	44	11,639
2017/2018	11,709	157	1,419	0	10,447
2018/2019	12,537	188	1,722	1,000	10,003
2019/2020	10,094	238	2,686	0	7,646
2020/2021	9,307	153	2,267	1,750	5,443
2021/2022	10,646	0	1,946	0	8,700
2022/2023	18,786	196	2,414	511	16,507
2023/2024 to Dec 2023	8,265	227	1,659	0	6,833

The above costs do not include the indirect costs associated with staff administering the Ranger Service and animal registrations. The operating losses average less than 1% of annual rates raised each year.

As can be seen, costs have increased significantly in the past year and a half. This is largely as result of the standard weekly hours charged being increased from 2 to 3, as well as an increase in the hourly rate.

Staff are of the opinion that the hourly rate is reasonable and reflects the specialised service received.

## **Other factors for consideration**

Regulatory requirements – there are a number of Acts and Regulations that Ranger Services typically fall under.

Local governments have responsibility for the registration and control of Dogs (Dog Act 1976) and Cats (Cat Act 2011). The Ranger also enforces the Shire of Trayning Dogs Local Law and a range of other legislation including the Animal Welfare Act 2002 and the Bush Fires Act 1954.

Changes to legislation are out of the Shire's control and may have an impact on future levels of service and costs. For example the Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Act 2021 and new centralised animal registration system are yet to impact on local governments.

### Independence of contractor

It has been beneficial to have Ranger Services carried out by someone from outside the district. This removes any actual or perceived bias that can result when the Ranger Services are carried out by an employee or someone living locally and provides a degree of safety for the Ranger as their residential address and personal details are generally unknown.

### Specialist skills/knowledge

Rangers usually undergo industry specific training on a regular basis. Their skills and knowledge must continually be at a high level so as to remain totally competent and professional at all times.

Training courses include general law enforcement, prosecutions, conflict management, firefighting, animal capture & handling, reptile handling, firearms, customer service and first aid.

### Rehoming Service

A1 Wheatbelt Dog Rescue is a non-profit organisation in Northam that was set up by the owner of the contract Ranger Service. They rehome surrendered or seized dogs from the 40 Shires they service following sterilisation, vaccination and microchipping.

Without access to this service, the Shire would have to euthanize animals which could otherwise be rehomed.

## **Alternative methods of delivery**

### Ad Hoc

Instead of a weekly service, the Shire could hire a contractor only as required. There may be some cost savings, however the availability of contract staff on an ad hoc basis would not be guaranteed if they have an otherwise full work load or roster.

### Resource Sharing

The Shire of Trayning received Ranger Services from the Shire of Merredin until 2014 when the Shire of Merredin proposed increasing annual fees for the participating Shires to enable them to hire an additional Ranger.

The Shire of Merredin is now using the same contractor as the Shire of Trayning. All of the Shires within the North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils and the Shire of Kellerberrin, the Shire of Trayning's only other neighbouring local government, are using contract rangers.

The closest local government with their own staff providing Ranger Services is the Shire of Northam. Given the distance for travel, it is unlikely that there is any benefit in approaching them to provide Ranger Services.

### In House

The Shire could consider training gardening staff to be able to be appointed under the various legislation covered by Ranger Services. The Shire would need to purchase equipment such as cages, traps and other animal handling equipment.

While this would mean that some complaints may be dealt with more promptly than, it has a number of disadvantages, particularly the risks associated with staff having existing relationships with residents and a lack of safety in relation to their privacy.