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sajd

animal welfare directorates reform 2023-2026

ANIMAL WELFARE
DIRECTORATE REFORM
2023 -2026



**GVERN
TA' MALTA**

MINISTERU GĦALL-AGRIKOLTURA,
IS-SAJD U D-DRITTIJIET TAL-ANNIMALI
SEGRETARJU PARLAMENTARI
GĦAS-SAJD, L-AKWAKULTURA
U D-DRITTIJIET TAL-ANNIMALI



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AWD
DIRECTORATE
REFORM
2023-2026

This strategic reform document has been developed, after consultation with stakeholders and review of relevant documentation, to address the shortcomings within the Animal Welfare Department. These limitations emanate from different streams of inputs including a risk-based audit on the effectiveness of implemented controls to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, recommendations by the Commissioner for Animal Welfare and from investigations carried out at the Animal Welfare Department.

Specifically in Malta, the Animal Welfare Directorate (AWD) is responsible for the welfare of animals (excluding farm animals intended for food production) and is involved in operations to rescue abandoned animals or in danger, perform inspections to enforce EU and national animal welfare legislation and safeguard the handling and transfer of ownership of animals.

Following various negative audit reports and other adverse media coverage, the Directorate requires an immediate re-evaluation of current resources and overhaul of organisational and digital infrastructure to effectively maximise of resources and service provision to the local community.

As such, the purpose of this report is to outline the actionable priorities to be adopted by the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights, specifically the Animal Welfare Directorate, in the immediate term 2023-2026.

The Strategy Reform structure thus puts forward a suite of guiding principles and actions for AWD's effective and efficient implementation of controls and operational measures.

FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND ANIMAL RIGHTS



The Animal Welfare Act has been strengthened to facilitate enforcement and a 'blacklist' has been established to reduce the possibility that those in breach of the Act could purchase or adopt additional animals.



Over the last 3 years we have held an extensive number of meetings with NGOs and other stakeholders; through these exchanges it became evident that we are all working to ensure the safety and welfare of animals and that we must continue to work together. Through meetings and public consultations, including those held during the AgriFair, it became clear that although good work was being done there was room for improvement.

We have listened to this call and made strategic changes, such as bringing in new animal ambulances, building a new cattery at Animal Welfare and expanding the capacity to rescue more dogs, including run free areas and dog pools.

In addition, to celebrate those that work tirelessly with animals and to celebrate those animals that bring us joy, last year we initiated the Animal Honours Awards, and this has been held annually ever since, in line with the parameters suggested by the stakeholders. In addition, Animal Welfare Community Stewards were introduced as a pilot project to assist Animal Welfare in educating on the well-being of animals in our homes and to assist cat feeders when needed, this will be expanded to cover all regions.

The Animal Welfare Act has been strengthened to facilitate enforcement and a 'blacklist' has been established to reduce the possibility that those in breach of the Act could purchase or adopt additional animals. Animal Welfare have been given enforcement powers to immediately enter a premises should there be substantiated grounds for suspicion of breach of the Animal Welfare Act. Bestiality has been outlawed and administrative penalties relating to offences against the Animal Welfare Act have been introduced; we have increased the legal size of enclosures for dogs. We have banned breeding of animals for production of fur and we have banned the production of foies gras.

We are looking at how best to oversee issues such as breeders, groomers and boarders that will address the concerns raised.

Neutering of stray cats has been a priority and we have issued a number of 'vouchers' over the last three years through which over a thousand cats have been neutered, over and above all the cats that Animal Welfare has rescued and neutered. Various funding programmes are in place to assist cat feeders, sanctuaries and NGOs such as the Animal Welfare Fund, the LC Care Scheme, funding to NGOs for adoptions and vet care.

So why a reform exercise? Notwithstanding all these actions taken, stakeholders have expressed additional concerns. We decided that the best option would be to engage external consultants to provide a clear understanding of the shortcomings and the path to improvement.

This document is a result of four months of evaluation and subsequent recommendations will be taken on board and implemented.

We thank you all, Animal Welfare staff, stakeholder, NGOs, volunteers for your perseverance and dedication towards the well being of our animals and we look forward to continuing our work together.

Dr Anton Refalo
Minister for Agriculture,
Fisheries and Animal Rights.

FOREWORD

BY THE
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
FOR FISHERIES,
AQUACULTURE AND ANIMAL
RIGHTS



Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened. The ceaseless work of Malta's Animal Welfare Directorate reflects the soul that we as a country share – we are a nation of animal lovers.



Change to make Malta a better place for animals

The latest statistics published indicate how nearly 60% of all families in Malta and Gozo own at least one pet in their household. This does not include the thousands of animals found in our farms which contribute significantly to our country's food production.

The Animal Welfare Directorate helps in overseeing the health and welfare of all animals on both an individual, and national scale. It operates in a multi-faceted sector which interacts with all walks of life: the public sector, private companies, the tireless volunteers and NGOs, and private citizens. This important work is something that we, as citizens, have asked the Directorate to do on our behalf because it is important to all of us that animals are well taken care of. It touches on all points of our lives because, beyond the well-being of animals that we can see in public, our efforts leave an indirect effect on us humans as well.

Since the beginning of my appointment as Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Animal Rights, I have been in close contact with many of the people who are most passionate about animal welfare in the country. I have listened carefully to the concerns and criticisms made about the work of the Directorate.

I thank the Commissioner for Animal Welfare for her commitment and her work.

As I listened to these concerns, it was important to highlight the good work that many of the Directorate's staff perform with some of them going well beyond the call of duty. I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff in the Directorate for Animal Welfare who work with such passion. I also want to thank all those volunteers who quietly turn up every day and do their bit. You make Malta a better place for animals. But in listening to the criticisms that were made both publicly before Parliament and privately, it became very clear that there is a need for real change. This change needs a vision which ensures that your concerns are properly addressed – because you speak for those who have no voice.

This Strategy Document is our response to those concerns, addressing, in a comprehensive manner, all facets related to the Animal Welfare sector in our country. As a Government, we are committed to lead its implementation in the coming months and years. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to remaining transparent, proactive, and willing to listen. This document is an invitation for stakeholders, all of whom altruistically dedicate their daily lives for the benefit of animals. Change cannot take place in isolation. I remain committed to maintaining an open dialogue, fostering further cohesion between all public agencies, private entities, the voluntary sector, and private citizens. Your feedback is integral in ensuring that our country takes all the necessary steps forward.

Your compassion and love for animals has spoken very clearly to me. Let us begin together the work of making Malta a better place for animals.

Dr Alicia Bugeja Said
Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries,
Aquaculture and Animal Rights.

CONTEXT



BACKGROUND

The Animal Health and Welfare Department (AHWD) forms part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA) and coordinates and regulates activities to ensure compliancy with requirements of domesticated animal health, animal welfare, feed and food law. Furthermore, the AHWD also sees the protection and preservation of local agriculture and thus contributes to its sustainability by preventing the introduction and spreading of pests and diseases in Malta.

The AWD together with the Commissioner for Animal Welfare is also responsible for activities promoting the welfare of animals and educating against the abuse and exploitation of animals. Depending on the nature of operations, the Directorate cooperates with other entities including the Civil Protection Department and the Police Department during its rescue and inspection operations respectively as well as procuring veterinary services from A.P.H Limited.

The Directorate also provides appropriate recovery and subsequent temporary homing for pet animals either at its facilities or by engaging entrusted third parties including NGOs, fosterers and adopters due to capacity issues and strives for adequate nutrition, medical care and humane treatment of domesticated animals under its care.

In order to incentivise a collaborative effort between NGO's, local councils and the wider general public, the Directorate issues and administers various schemes that target areas of assistance within this remit, including but not limited to the Animal Welfare Fund, Free Veterinary Services for sanctuaries, Adopt a Pet Allowance and the Local Council fund.

The AWD collaborates with the MCAST Centre for Agriculture, Aquatics and Animal Sciences for the education and training of its employees and aims to have the ideal conditions for domesticated animals under its care to be trained and healthy as this is seen to not only safeguard the welfare of domesticated animals, but also increases the likelihood of adoption.

One of the ultimate goals of the AWD is to constantly work towards improving the welfare of the current state of both strays as well as domesticated animals by taking on new initiatives year on year. To this end, ongoing structural projects of the AWD include:

- i. A cattery which will include isolation units for sick cats
- ii. A new dog section of dog pens which will increase capacity by 100%
- iii. A pet memorial
- iv. Rehoming Centre in Ta' Qali

The AWD is regulated by the Animal Welfare Act (Chapter 439 of the Laws of Malta) which identifies the role of the Director of Animal Welfare as the one which sets the direction and actionable priorities of the directorate as a whole. The Act also identifies the role of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare who has the obligation and duty to review and investigate, either out of his/her own motion or following a complaint received by him/her, the Directorate responsible for Animal Welfare.

CURRENT SCENARIO AND KEY FIGURES

It remains imperative that through the reform document and the specific implementation, management and upkeep of the centralised management system, data will be consistently recorded and analysed to effectively budget and alleviate resource strains and ultimately better the service provision of the Directorate.

In operation of its rehoming and emergency service provision, over the past three-years alone, the AWD had addresses surges of abandoned animal pickups, having higher trend increases for cat pick-ups than dogs.

At the time of writing of this report, there were 60 dogs being kept at the Animal Welfare premises, 9 dogs in private kennels, 7 at the quarantined centre and 9 dogs being currently fostered.

Admissions

Analysis from the Directorate's data listings depict that admissions to the Animal Welfare throughout the 4-year period being studied (2019-2022) were mostly prevalent for cats, rather than dogs, with an average of 1,742 cat admissions a year and opposed by an average of 636 dog admissions a year.

Registered Calls

For the 3-year period 2019-2021, the year with the largest volume of calls was 2019 with 6,100 registered calls. During 2021 however the volume of calls has decreased by almost half to 3,223 calls being registered.

Emergency Calls Registered

The highest volume of calls of reports received for emergency services were registered to be made during the month of May 2021 with 595 calls being registered and 429 calls being registered during May 2022 respectively. The least volume of emergency calls were however registered during the month of January, over a two-year period analysis of which information was available.

Inspections

During the 3-year period (2019-2021) of analysis, the number of reports received amounted to circa 2,458, out of which 1,794 inspections were performed, resulting in a response rate of c. 73%. The highest response rate has taken place in 2021 at 79%, followed by a 75% response rate in 2019 and 60% response rate in 2020. For the years 2019 to 2020 a percentage decrease of the number of reports received of c. 19% is observed, which paced slightly picked up by c.35% still at a low rate, potentially due to various factors, with representatives at Directorate level highlighting lack of confidence in action of the Directorate as one of the main factors followed by the lack of trained staff.

Follow-up Inspections

During the year of 2021, for the months of January, February and October the number of reports performed outnumbered the number of reports received. This suggests that reports received during the previous months were then performed at a later stage, with delays possibly occurring according to the nature of the case/s at hand, with management singling out the lack of effective structure and human resource as a key factor to late case assignments and inaction through inspections.

PURPOSE

The AWD was subject to a risk-based Internal Audit covering all operational process and procedure related to the AWD within the AHW. The overall objective of the audit was to identify areas of improvement within the department to deduce actionable priorities that will provide reasonable assurance on the effectiveness of implemented controls to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the operations of the AWD in the immediate and longer term.

The independent Internal Auditors' opinion, based on the controls relating to the efficiency and effectiveness of the operation of the Animal Welfare Directorate with the Animal Health and Welfare Department, was found to be unsatisfactory with key operational reform being identified as crucial for the adequate administration of the Directorate.

In addition, in 2021, the Commissioner for Animal Welfare (thereafter referred to in this report as the 'Commissioner') Ms. Alison Bezzina, presented fifteen (15) recommendations to Hon. Alicia Bugeja Said and Hon. Anton Refalo, most of which have been accepted and included in the Labour Party's Electoral Manifesto. In 2022, three (3) additional recommendations were presented which include more dog friendly run spaces, a National Census of Captive Animals in Malta and Gozo and improving the electronic microchipping system and its enforcement, including the possibility of shared ownership and the automatic flagging of people having a ban order by the regulatory system from owning dogs or other domesticated animals.

The Directorate thus seeks to address the above considerations, through a strategic reform report that will detail an effective way forward, set on identified strategic pillars that outline specific actionable priorities and recommendations for the immediate and longer-term.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Extensive review of current operational and management process were evaluated to present a dire operational context within the Animal Welfare Department. This coupled with the recent public outrage and court cases on key sensitive national priorities such as euthanasia and malpractice with abandoned animals sparked the need for operational reform within the Directorate.

Data from the audit reports were utilised, whereby the reform strategies in the document were extracted and applied to the local context from extensive market research at Directorate level, implemented by other countries such as Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. Such best practices were coupled and implemented for national priorities as listed in the electoral manifesto and other recommendations by the Commissioner for Animal Welfare.

Vision Statement

To ensure effective conduct and procedure to holistically safeguard local domesticated animal well-being

Mission Statement

To ensure a collaborative, technically savvy and empathetic approach to the provision of appropriate homing, nutrition, medical care, humane treatment and handling of domesticated animals

In line with Maltese legislation and EU Regulations, the Animal Welfare Directorate's immediate mission is to eradicate the exploitation of domesticated animals through effective care together with information and educational stimulus. This for a longer-term goal of top-quality animal welfare service provision by striving to improve and expand facilities for surrendered, abandoned and rescued domesticated animals as well as expanding the collaborative arm through community outreach.

7 Strategic Pillars

7 strategic pillars have been identified in ensuring the successful implementation and execution of the vision and mission statements set out by the Animal Welfare Directorate for the term 2023-2026. These include;



01.

Access to
Accreditable
Information and
systems

04.

Digital
Transformation
to Centralised
Systems

02.

High Quality
Infrastructure

05.

Clear Procedures
and Strict
Operational
Conduct

03.

Effective Human
Capital

06.

Governance
and Regulatory
Enforcement

07.

Public
Engagement and
Online Presence

PILLAR

01

ACCESS



Guiding Principle

To have full accessibility, availability of reliable and timely information.

Access will be a key pillar to the Directorate's reform document, in creating an enabling environment for resources to be effectively identified and managed. Collaborative access will not only facilitate the service provision by the directorate but allow for a more comprehensive all-encompassing access.

Internal Access

The introduction of a centralised management information system will streamline the entire record keeping process of the AWD, revolutionising the administrative process at the Directorate. Systems such as the AWIS, CFMS integrated within the wider digital management system will increase access to information internally and also contribute towards environmental objectives such as waste management in reduction of paper use.

The digital system will also allow for increased wider scope access to all service lines and officers in maintain track of all correspondence in real-time and updates on a case-by-case basis, contributing towards a more holistic and timely service offering. This enhanced access to information will allow for accurate data reporting to be made to public officials as well as the wider general public when requested. Access will also be made for tracking of court case assignments and restrictions in real-time in line with all GDPR requirements.

Funding Incentives for general public access

Various schemes and initiatives already operated by the Directorate will be reviewed on an annual basis, with full public engagement considerations taken into account, including but not limited to:

- Animal Welfare Fund in providing financial assistance to Voluntary Organisations that work within the animal welfare sector. This is directed mainly towards animal shelters, NGOs and other groups that offer assistance to animals enabling such organisations to effect improvements to animal care.
- The Local Council Fund in providing funds to local councils to embark on projects that enhance the life of stray cats and dogs. This following a call subject to selection criteria.
- Veterinary Service to Non-Government Organisations Grant whereby the AWD provides a one-time annual grant to provide support to non-government, non-profit organisations to cater for specific expenses related to veterinary services and treatment.
- Community Animal Stewardship Scheme providing financial assistance to local council to engage the wider general public to educate people on animal welfare considerations such as microchipping.

Adoptions by NGOs Grant in providing a one-time payment to non-government, non-profit organisations as compensation for every animal being adopted, varying according to the size and age of the animal.

With reference to the contextual detail of rehoming rates and other key performance indicators, it can be attested that the implementation and continuation of the schemes ensures that the Directorate can adhere to recent performance, alleviating the resource-oriented strains of the Directorate, facilitated through funding allocation by the Ministry of Finance.



PILLAR

02

INFRASTRUCTURE

Guiding Principle

To provide accommodating and tailored infrastructure

Infrastructural integrity drives the effective allocation of domesticated animal care. The availability of space remains an inherent limitation within the Directorate and the wider public and private enterprise space. Priority will also be directed to internal infrastructural improvements that will better the service provision offered by the Animal Welfare Directorate. Furthermore, digital infrastructure will also be allocated significant investment to improve upon the efficiency of service provision of the directorate, both within the directorate and externally with stakeholders and end users.



Internal Infrastructural Investment

Internal infrastructural investment will be allocated during the immediate term in addressing the accommodative limitations currently prevalent within the Directorate. The Directorate, has and will continue to invest in a rapid response animal ambulance service, having already invested in two fully air-conditioned vans for animal transportation and emergency service response that are to be utilised on a contingency basis.

All emergency vehicles will also be equipped with Veterinary Support Officers that are able to provide first aid medical assistance in providing an efficient and truly holistic emergency service.

In alleviating the limitation of internal housing space for abandoned domesticated animals, the Directorate will accelerate the expansion of new pens at the Animal Welfare Directorate, investing in third-party kennels and campaigns for home fostering in the interim. A new fenced open space in Għammieri will be provided to serve for observation and training purposes prior to rehoming of domesticated animals. This would reduce the issue of lack of voluntary resources and the avoidance of behavioural incidents.

Housing abandoned domesticated animals poses its own unique challenges in safeguarding the safety of all animals with various needs. As such, a long-term goal of the directorate will be to set up a rehabilitation and rehoming centre in Ta' Qali as per the electoral manifesto measures to be implemented, supervised by specialist staff with effective rehabilitation programmes to take place at a slower and longer pace to ensure optimal preparation for rehoming. This to also be extended to pregnant animals such as horses and other abandoned animals.

New examination room and clinic facilities

The AWD also recognises the urgent need for an examination room following emergency service dispatch. An internal location for the examination room has already been identified with all after care occurring at the 'Għammieri' premises. The Directorate will be hiring clinic facilities to be used for basic services as neutering and dental procedures for strays and animals under the care of the Animal Welfare Directorate.

Additional Spaces

Ongoing projects by the AWD that will be finalised and intensely utilised within the immediate term include a cattery and additional space for dogs which will include isolation and quarantine units for sick animals, together with further investment in a pet memorial. Additional spaces will also be allocated to allow for a 'meet and greet' for animal adoption together with extended fenced spaces to allow for recreational exercise and training of animals in the care of AWD.

In the longer term, the AWD also envisages investment in cat cafes and dog parks in full collaboration with respective local councils also serving as part of an educational campaign to reduce the number of stray and abandoned animals. More zones will also be identified to cater for increased dog parks to offer access to recreational space for domesticated animals across Malta and Gozo.

Digital Infrastructure

The digital transformation will play a pivotal role in upgrading the current infrastructure at the AWD with the main introduction of a new call service centre in centralising all communication to end users. Through the migration of the 1717 telephony to servizz.gov call centre, in being a quality service award holder, the directorate will be providing a professional 24/7 high quality, level of service and customer care excellence.

To this end, the management of the emergency line will be outsourced, with all incoming calls being handled by trained staff at servizz.gov, further detailed in a subsequent pillar.

Availability of Space

In tackling the lack of specifically allocated space, various recommendations posed by audit committees have redirected towards leveraging already available land in allowing for a wider coverage of dog friendly spaces, most specifically;

- Expanding the availability of friendly run-free spaces (including dog friendly beaches) to allow for expression of natural behaviour.
- Areas will be bordered off with fewer dogs in each segment, to allow for visibility by owner's and in close proximity within 100 to 200sqm.

Dog Friendly Beaches

With 10 officially registered dog-friendly beaches, the Directorate will ensure that, adequate signage will be placed, with a minimum of 5 dog litter pens. An investigative review of additional potential dog friendly beaches will also be undertaken, to maximise the use of available beach space within this regard and funds will be made available to improve access to these beaches.

Rebranding

The AWD will also rebrand utilising a new visual identity, including but not limited to a new logo and colour schemes, new uniforms and car wrapping as well as integrating a mascot for campaign purposes for wider national engagement and reach.



PILLAR

03

HUMAN CAPITAL

Guiding Principle

Having effective, highly trained specialised individuals that add-value to the human resource capacity of the directorate.

With increasing rehoming and abandoned domestic animal cases on the increase, the AWD has redirected focus onto the restructuring of its human capital resource. This to ensure that an effective allocation, of highly specialised individuals will be attracted and retained by the Directorate to better the service provision currently being offered. Multiple reports as well as the latest audit findings have noted shortcomings on skills assignment and requirements, with various gaps being identified that will be addressed through this reform document for the immediate three-year term.

Skill Requirement and Allocation

The reform will cover all stages of human capital allocation, the start being at recruitment stage. This is due to the fact that in previous years, there was no qualification requirement for entry for the position of animal welfare officer. Proper candidate assessment processes will be implemented to better identify the hard and soft skills of current and potential candidates to adequately perform sensitive tasks. This would be facilitated through the use of thorough and complete job descriptions that are to be logged and reviewed by top management for each Unit.

Induction sessions will be implemented to cover a three-day span, with full-service provision and hands-on training being provided for all sub-departments. This would be all encapsulated via a candidate assessment framework that will capture all of the skills and capabilities required to fulfil duties in a specific job description resulting in operational efficiency and effectiveness. All documentation will be retained by the directorate, for reference purposes and act as a reference point to assess the competency of the employee prior to onboarding.

It will be the Directorate's standard operating procedure, to set minimum eligibility requirements for individuals who wish to work with the Directorate.

Specific training by the Directorate at in-house level will also be provided to upskill and retain talent already within the Directorate's remit and minimise disruption to the service offerings of the Directorate.

Maximising Optimal Requirements

The AWD will prioritise efficiency and the maximum utilisation of available resources, in identifying a clear link between the operational and animal care requirements necessary for effective care.

Adequate staffing levels will be maintained within the Directorate to ensure no excess or shortage of staff is prevalent. This to be facilitated through a new digital centralised system that logs calls received, rescue and enforcement operations by category, allowing for effective planning, for review each year for successive years.

Following the first four quarters of data gathering, an internal exercise identifying the number of resources required matched to respective skills per service provision will be analysed and human resources reallocated as needed to minimise costs. Such data will be pegged to number of employees required and duration of operation necessary. In this manner, departmental flows can be analysed through collected logged data and management interviews on each departmental requirement in terms of human resources.

All reported and logged cases will also be subsequently followed up by call centre representatives to monitor how cases were handled by inspectors/rescuers, providing vital information and insight into the required human resources on-site and whether the manner was professionally and appropriately handled.

Furthermore, timesheets for on-site inspections will also be logged and adequately kept to assess HR allocation for each case. Back-end operations will also need to be included to ensure efficient upkeep of digital system records.

Identification of required HC

Following an in-depth evaluation of the human resources required, the AWD will tackle the lack of specialised resources in the scale of inspectors, in addressing any delays in inspections of domestic residences and other follow-up cases. This extended to personnel required for operation of the new ambulance and rescue service in veterinary support officers, which evaluation of resource requirement will be outsourced.

An adoption committee will be appointed, specifically to oversee the adoption process and serve as a point of redress if adoption is refused. The terms of reference of the board and the adoption criteria will be published through a legal notice.

Following the identified gap of legal considerations, a legal officer/procurator will be appointed to follow all court cases and maintain record-keeping of all legal and regulatory related cases. The individual will be responsible for drawing up reports, prepare court-related activities, argue in court and keep documented track of all cases to provide adequate and timely direction to the Directorate inspectors.

In fully leveraging the digital transformation strategy, a key individual will be appointed to fully implement and ensure directorate wide access and usage of the centralised management system. The individual will serve as the system administrator, with the sufficient skills, capabilities and experience on the operations of the AWD and animal welfare requirements together with the IT competent skills to be in a position to test and better understand the current functionalities of the AWIS. The individual would thereafter be tasked to provide a user manual on the system to assist all users.

The AWD will also assign one individual to promote public engagement in effectively promoting adoption, retain constant communication with fosterers and potential adopters. In addition, the assignee will also be responsible to provide and log feedback received about various functions and services of the Directorate.

Training

Continuous training will be offered to officers engaged in all units and all necessary specialised hires will be implemented with adequate training during onboarding and probationary periods. Continuous training will also be provided on a bi-annual basis to all key employees. Individuals dealing with animals with a history of 'aggression' will be identified and assigned on a case by case basis, only to be walked by an experienced volunteer/staff member who would have attended regular in-house training specifically on challenging and aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, during walking hours, such members will be wearing visibility vests to indicate passers-by to the nature of the dog, with dogs wearing a respective muzzle. Regular training of this level will be delivered by an experienced dog behaviourist that also add to the efficacy of rehoming rates.

Training to all employees on an annual basis will also be specifically targeted to include the socialisation and rehabilitation of dogs to increase rehoming rates.

Volunteers will also be subject to aptitude testing and regular in-house training on a bi-monthly basis and will only deal with regularised domesticated animal cases and not challenging behaviour cases. Volunteers will be assessed and engaged in accordance with the standard operating procedure for volunteers.

Restructuring of AWD

Through the implementation of all of the above-mentioned actionable priorities, a thorough review of the current organigram was performed with the newly proposed human resource structure including implemented department changes.

The full implementation of the human resource strategy will be implemented following a thorough evaluation of current skill-set in-house followed by external reviews that will be procured.

This strategic reform document details various areas for improvement within the Animal Welfare Directorate, all of which cannot be in place without effective staff. As such, the Directorate has undertaken an internal exercise to establish the skill sets that can be retained or reskilled by current staff, together with new vacancies required to efficiently deliver across all service platforms in the coming three years.



PILLAR

04

DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION



Guiding Principle

To centralise and digitise processes for and efficient service provision

Digital transformation will play a pivotal role in the reformation of the Animal Welfare Directorate with centralisation of data, effective record keeping and evaluation at the core. This deemed as crucial in effective planning management efforts as well as in delivering high quality service provision. Through digitisation, management could also log process and customise metric analysis in identifying optimal resource allocation within each Unit. The digital system will provide data integration into a single, shareable source, minimising the time spent on record information and reducing inefficiencies caused by inaccurate and incomplete data.

Centralised Management Information System

The AWD places significant importance to stakeholder engagement and as such requires various inputs from a number of internal and external stakeholders to collect data at various stages including domesticated animal data, third party data, logs and inventory data. Typically, the main methods of data collection consisted of email and call correspondence through the use of manually input spreadsheets on the Animal Welfare Management System (AWIS) without a centralised system across all units.

An individual will be identified to be made very familiar with the system and offer continuous training of the relevant systems. This will also contribute to reduce time taken for administrative tasks with efficient access to information via the management system. Servizz.gov agents will also have access to this system so that data can be available in real-time with access to case history so that timely and efficient follow-ups can be made without delay. This will also facilitate user communication when requested by the end client, all in adherence to GDPR regulation. In order to have a coherent and time-sensitive system, all verbal communication should be followed up through a digital record in the form of inputting in the system on a case-by-case basis.

All incoming calls either via Servizz.gov or general contact line at the Directorate will be recorded and logged accordingly. Clear time limits for reports logging, the conducting of inspections, updating of internal reports after inspections and updating callers/reporters. The system will automatically red flag when dates are approaching or are missed as per the SOP.

Microchipping

As part of the centralised management information system, microchipping will also be encouraged, with all admitted animals to be microchipped. Through the AHWD National Livestock Database, animal data will be recorded including microchipping details, neutering status and registration information. Furthermore, this database will also be integrated to data maintained for individuals who voluntarily choose to microchip their animals to be notified immediately with an official certificate being automatically issued. Furthermore, when such microchip is transferred from one owner to another, the new owner will be notified in the same manner when the transfer successfully is accepted and implemented.

Inventory Tracking System

Through the CFMS, further detailed information of all animal specifications are recorded, including the daily intake of resources including but not limited to food, water and medicine intake. This information will facilitate resource management to maintain reorder levels and quantities to ensure that all domesticated animals within the AWD's care, have the necessary food to cater for their nutritional needs, with food items replenished in good time, avoiding stockouts.

Data Availability

The Directorate will also see that key information on nation wide domesticated animal data is kept, by proposing the introduction of a separate and obligatory nationwide animal census. This is to also be extended for registration of exotic, dangerous and wild animals.

The database will also extend to include 'blacklisted' individuals who have been forbidden by court order from owning animals, digitally synced to the microchipping database and programmed to automatically trigger an alert when someone who is on the 'blacklisted' database to block attempts to microchip an animal in their name.

Online Portal

Cats and dogs under the care of the Animal Welfare Directorate will feature on a centralised online portal, via the website, where registered sanctuaries can upload animals that are available for adoption. This portal will include both photographic and video recordings of the animals together with the different key variables such as age, gender, size/weight, temperament, medical needs and character traits. In turn, potential adopters visiting the portal would mark their preferred variables and the system would automatically match the respective prospective adopter to the ideal animal candidate via criteria evaluation.

Servizz.gov

The call service centre through Servizz.gov will introduce the line 1717 together with 153 as the main customer service portal to expedite and better track and log queries. Having a quality service charter partner will guarantee high quality service provision that will facilitate record keeping, logging and timely response rates. The Directorate will however retain a specific email to address reports on abused and neglected companion animals.

PILLAR

05

OPERATIONAL
CONDUCT

Guiding Principle

Having streamlined and effectively implemented SOP's

Formalised standard operating procedures (SOP) fully integrated within the digital infrastructural will prove crucial for the successful dimensioning of the AWD for the immediate term. Precise, clear and concrete SOP's will be set out and fully implemented at all levels within the Units outlining the main responsibilities and reporting requirements thereafter to ensure full actionable priorities are recorded and followed upon, covering the entire service provision of the Directorate.

Standard Operating Procedures

One clear set of operating procedures manual, updated to reflect the current service offerings and scenario of the directorate will be created and implemented in the immediate term. This will include both internal operating conduct and external, particularly for microchipping processes once abandoned dogs are identified and brought in by the Directorate.

All communication is to be logged in the centralised management information system with adequate flagging when necessary. This will also be extended to financial management procedures within the remit of the accounts unit at the AWD to adhere to strict protocol re budgeting and financial control measures. In ensuring full adoption of all SOP's, all new recruits will be provided with a copy of the SOP's manual, and required to sign that all has been reviewed and understood.

Training will be offered on a general basis as well as specific basis particularly for employees working with challenging behaviour domesticated animals. A SOP specifically for volunteer involvement will also be drawn up, specifically outlining the eligibility criteria, remit and responsibilities of volunteers, specifically for those dealing with challenging cases when performing activities such as dog walking.

Inspections

All inspections shall be conducted according to official protocol as stipulated within the SOP's and by officers specifically identified to perform the task. Such inspections will be performed in a timely manner and with specialised training in constant communication with the legal representative.

Veterinary Services

The new animal care section shall have a veterinarian present who will be responsible for the animals being cared for at the Paw protection rescue centre and cattery, whilst a second veterinarian will be responsible to attend during certain inspections and to assess the rescued or confiscated animals admitted directly at the AWD. Both veterinarians will be involved in the neutering conducted by the AWD. Staff within this unit will also be expected to visit the various sanctuaries and continue to liaise with managers on adoptions, transfers and rehoming. All to be logged in the centralised management information system.



PILLAR

06

GOVERNANCE



Guiding Principle

To implement robust financial and legal processes that is coherent to regulatory frameworks

Governance and regulatory oversight will be a key pillar to set forward precedent for the guidance that is to be conducted with regards to internal and external animal treatment and upkeep. This will help bridge the gap between formal requirements for regulatory policy and the implementation of better regulation efforts in practice, eliminating grey areas and engaging more practicable regulation and legislation. Furthermore, this chapter will also provide insight into the financial budgeting process and the consequent SOP in this regard.

Robust Budgeting Process

The Directorate will perform an internal financial review to date to be in a better position to plan and allocate resources effectively. Past expenditures and unforeseen costs during the current years, buffer and target allocations respectively. The digital transformation process will be key to setting up and maintaining a robust budgetary process with appropriate record keeping and supporting evidence for budget setting for the consequent 12-month reporting period.

The budgetary process will be the responsibility of top management, including all units individually and aggregately to ensure that all financial aspects are taken into account holistically. Budgeting tools will be utilised to assist with prioritising setting goals as well as evaluating the various routes the AWD might opt to undertake and to determine which course of action works best at minimal cost through scenario analysis. During the operating year, top management will review progress periodically to ensure that budgets are being adhered to and goals being met at individual and unit level.

Full record of expenditure categories are to be recorded to track under or overestimation of resources that feed into the general guidelines of set budgeting for the next operating year through a spending review evaluation on a monthly basis at unit level and annual basis at directorate level. This will provide a basis for performance ratios to be compiled on a periodic basis together with an explanation of variances between budgeted and actual expenditure to be analysed.

Funding and schemes are also be reviewed periodically, including the Animal Welfare Fund, the LC Care Fund, Adopt a Pet Allowance, Rehoming Allowance and free animal medical care service.

Furthermore, adequate budgeting will need to be allocated to public engagement endeavours such as advertising services

Legislation and Regulation

Accelerate the introduction of new breeding laws and enhance enforcement to reduce the number of abandoned dogs on the street including farm dogs and feral dogs with owners, particularly within the regard of the breeding and importation of certain breeds which are difficult to rehome.

Mandatory electronic microchipping of dogs with administrative fines to be strengthened and enforcement efforts as advertised. This will act as a deterrent and an educational exercise for all domesticated animal owners. Promote the benefits of microchipping of cats and encourage the voluntary microchipping.

Advocate for the AWD to be within its remit to declare a situation as urgent, providing police authorities the authorisation to enter premises to save an animal even when the owner of the said property cannot be traced.

The AWD will see to temporarily ban a person from owning or keeping any animals at least until all court cases are finalised, after which the court will conclude whether to uphold or dismiss the Director's decision, already set in motion by the date of this reform document.

Review of current laws that provide courts with a wider possibility to ban people found guilty of animal cruelty, abuse and neglect of animals to be extended to a ban from also owning other animals, with no immediate family member within the same household to be able to inherit the animal through a clause revision in the Animal Welfare Act CAP 439.

1. Prioritisation for the regularisation of para veterinary professions under the Veterinary Services Act CAP 437 (4)(1b) via the Veterinary Surgeons Council.
2. Review of the regulations and licensing regime to regulate the services related to the care of animals, and the breeding of companion animals, including groomers, pet sitters and breeders. The review shall be consistent with the five freedoms to reflect best practice in the care and welfare of animals.
3. Clear communication on dog friendly beaches will be issued, in clarification to the rocky beaches allowance of dog access.

Internal Procedures

SOP's will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis with particular review of the SOP relating to transfer of domesticated animals to third parties, distinguishing between different third parties as well as temporary transfers in cases such as fostering and permanent transfers in cases such as adoption. Furthermore, SOP's review will be undertaken on an annual basis by all employees mandatorily. Furthermore, specific attention will be provided for the terms defining 'monitoring' outlining the steps that are to be undertaken during the aforementioned action. Particular attention will also be provided to the rewriting of specific SOP's, including but not limited to;

- microchipping check-ups, whereby officers utilise entity level transportation rather than the ambulance service to perform such tasks.
- SOP's specifying the minimum times required for aggressive behaviour procedure implementation
- SOP distinction between aggression towards humans and aggression towards domesticated animals respective procedures in such cases.

All cases shall be inputted and recorded in the digital system, with court cases including all hearing information to ensure appropriate coordination and effective implementation of court order controls.

PILLAR

07

PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT



Guiding Principle

To convey transparent and active communication through a collaborative effort

Transparent and Active communication will also be set as a main pillar to instill an active collaborative effort with the general public, the end users of the service provision of the Directorate. Through this continued communication, there would be better understanding of decisions at directorate level informed by public viewpoints and other stakeholder engagements.

Public Engagement

Through constant communication on directives and legislation that are to be observed as well as to serve as an informative arm on current schemes, new animals up for adoption and entice wider public engagement generally. Furthermore, in promotion of new services, the Directorate will issue a nationwide neutering campaign through a process of Trap, Neuter and Release (NTR) in full collaboration with NGO's, Local Councils, Volunteers and Feeders. The campaign will detail the process via different vets in various locations as well as recovery options for various scenarios. This coupled with an educational campaign on neutering to control the population of feral cats and dogs together with other inhouse services. Similarly, other campaigns portraying the ample benefits of microchipping will also be implemented.

Other informational dissemination would include stewardship services, to inform the general public on the Community Animal Welfare Standards initiative, intended to educate and create awareness on animal welfare and applicable laws. Furthermore, public engagement will also facilitate wider reach of information on the enforcement procedures by the AWD of animal welfare laws and highlight the outcome of penalties pertaining to law infringements. The AWD will also utilise various modes of communication to promote the new rehoming facilities being implemented.

The AWD will also make the new dog sections to be available for open days to promote adoptions engagement the general public directly through physical on-site interaction.

The AWD will also undertake an entire rebranding initiative including the introduction of a mascot to attract further public engagement. Specifically, the AWD will implement a change in uniform of rescue and enforcement officers to showcase officer work and presence.

An overarching national strategy for the longer-term will also be implemented in providing a holistic way forward for implementation of animal care and safeguarding of domesticated animal welfare.

Online Presence

The directorate will see to have its own online presence to improve upon trust and transparent levels of communication. This through social media presence via a well-maintained website and Facebook page, properly manned with updated news, engaging the general public to assist in adoptions and to reply to queries from wider stakeholders. Various media forms will be utilised including but not limited to, paid media in promotional material, owned media through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, a mobile app coupled with face-to-face interaction through visits to various institutions.



animal welfare



**GVERN
TA' MALTA**

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SECRETARJU PARLAMENTARI
GHAS-SAJD, L-AKWAKULTURA
U D-DRITTIJET TAL-ANNIMALI