



King County

Dow Constantine

King County Executive

Regional Animal Services of King County Roadmap for Reform

The Roadmap for Reform of King County animal services begins with creation of a new regional animal services model jointly developed by King County and its city partners. The model preserves a regional service approach, which best provides for public health, safety, customer service and animal welfare.

Many improvements have been made over the last two years. At the Kent shelter, the welfare of both dogs and cats has improved with facility modifications and more effective cleaning protocols; the addition of a new trailer for cat adoptions; a new partnership with PIMA Medical Institute and expansion of veterinary services to limit the spread of disease; and improvements to animal comfort and care through the purchase of better cages and bedding, higher quality pet food, and additional exercise and socialization.

The county has also reduced the euthanasia rate at its shelter from 40 percent in 2006 to 17.6 percent in 2009. Adoptions and foster care placements have increased dramatically, from 4,525 in 2006 to 6,062 in 2008, largely due to the work of the many dedicated volunteers.

Under the leadership of County Executive Dow Constantine, the county has put in place a new management team that includes a new County Administrative Officer, a new interim manager for Records and Licensing Services, and a new manager of Regional Animal Services. Among other reforms, this new management team is taking a more proactive role on the prevention and investigation of animal cruelty, in support of a trend begun in 2009 that has seen the prosecution of more animal cruelty charges than ever before. In March, the team put in place procedures to systematically identify all new calls about animal cruelty, follow up weekly with field sergeants, and provide guidance to the animal cruelty sergeant when pursuing the most serious cases.

More must still be done. This Roadmap to Reform outlines actions, some of which are already underway, to address remaining deficiencies in animal care, disease prevention, shelter overpopulation, systems management, and animal cruelty investigation that have been identified as areas for improvement in the Animal Services Strategic Plan and in past reports and studies that have been conducted under the leadership of the King County Council.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS: Next Two Months

- Implement a new model for Regional Animal Services of King County by entering into new contracts with cities.
- Improve data collection and management through technology upgrades that support real-time access to data in the field and more robust tracking of animals in the shelter.

Animal Sheltering and Welfare

- Hire a field operations and external affairs manager, ideally with proven experience in animal services, to improve animal care, manage the animal population, work with community partners, and develop operating procedures and ensure that those procedures are followed.
- Hire a full-time volunteer coordinator, essential for increasing the number of volunteers and effectively managing them, maintaining animal care within available resources and moving animals quickly through the shelter system – in particular during the approaching peak summer season.
- Hire a veterinary medical director and two additional veterinary technicians to provide a higher level of care in the Kent shelter, in part through the use of funds donated for improved animal care.
- Manage the population at the Kent shelter within available resources to ensure proper care for animals through expanded use of existing shelter capacity elsewhere in the region, expanded use of foster families, and new policies regarding pet retention and field pick-ups.
- Provide a more consistent level of care at the Kent shelter by consolidating all staff at one facility.
- Prepare for the upcoming summer peak shelter population by filling new positions, utilizing short-term temporary employees, and aggressively recruiting foster families and volunteers.
- Increase adoption activities, including through the use of donated retail space at the Kent Station shopping mall and lower adoption fees during peak season.

Animal Control & Animal Cruelty

- Refine and continue to establish procedures to systematically identify all new calls about animal cruelty, follow up weekly with field sergeants, and provide guidance to the animal cruelty sergeant when pursuing the most serious cases.
- Work with the Sheriff's Office to develop procedures for responding quickly and more effectively to potential animal cruelty cases and issues of public safety, engage police earlier in the investigation of serious cases, and establish policies and procedures for after-hours dispatch.

- Work with the King County Prosecuting Attorney on developing procedures to more clearly establish the actions that animal control officers can take in potential animal cruelty cases, particularly with regard to the seizure or impoundment of healthy animals in situations where other animals have died or been harmed, and to clarify when criminal as opposed to civil actions can be taken.

Pet Licensing

- Create incentives to promote pet licensing, which both supports the return of animals to their homes and is critical to the funding of services, through expanded partnerships with cities and private organizations, a “no-tolerance” policy for enforcement of licensing, and changes to the structure of license fees.

MID-TERM ACTIONS: Six to Nine Months

- Engage outside experts to review shelter, veterinary clinic, and field operations, objectively evaluate the progress that has been made, and identify additional improvements that are needed.
- Accept credit card transactions both at the Kent shelter location and in the field to improve customer service and increase revenues.
- Work with city partners to develop performance measures and regular reports on performance to increase accountability for regional partners and the public, and identify opportunities to improve services, reduce costs and increase revenues.

Animal Sheltering and Welfare

- Implement measures that continue to improve animal care and welfare as identified through outside experts and new staff.
- Continue to develop volunteer and foster networks and partnerships with other animal welfare organizations.

Animal Control and Animal Cruelty

- Install laptops in animal control trucks for real-time access to and entry of dispatch and other data.
- Consider establishing operating bases in north or east county to provide consistent field services and a connection with and accountability to these communities.
- Implement procedures with the King County Sheriff’s Office and other police agencies to respond quickly and more effectively to potential animal cruelty cases and issues of public safety, and engage police earlier in the investigation of serious cases.
- Implement a systematic method for sorting through the 1,000 reported animal cruelty calls received annually, the vast majority of which turn out not to involve cruelty, so

that animal control officers and law enforcement can more effectively pursue actual cruelty cases.

- Implement new policies and training for police dispatchers for callout of animal control officers for after-hours emergencies.
- Implement actions related to work with the King County Prosecuting Attorney regarding potential animal cruelty cases.

Pet Licensing

- Evaluate changes to pet licensing fees and marketing efforts and continue to develop partnerships to increase the number of pets who are licensed.

LONG-TERM ACTIONS and CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: The Next 2.5 Years

- Continue to improve animal care and service delivery through continuous review and development of procedures to guide shelter and field operations and provide ongoing staff training.
- Foster innovative partnerships and joint programs with other organizations, including feral cat groups, spay/neuter programs, rescue groups, private shelters, and private-sector licensing partners to reduce the homeless animal population in the region.
- Increase donations and grants by seeking funding from foundations, animal welfare groups, and individual donors.
- Make improvements to existing facilities to prevent overcrowding, noise, and the spread of disease, as well as plan for the development of new regional sheltering space to ultimately replace the capacity provided by the Kent shelter.