

TO: Animal Welfare Advisory Committee  
FROM: Subcommittee  
DATE: June 3, 2021  
RE: Proposal to Limit the Number of Animals in Foster Homes

### Background

AWAC was asked to comment on a proposal to limit the number of animals allowed in foster homes. The proposal was raised by city council in response to a fire that occurred in a foster home that was housing approximately 40 cats. Not all of the cats were safely evacuated. We agree that this was a tragedy and should be reviewed so as to hopefully avert a recurrence in the future.

We invited the rescue group involved (SALT) to the March 5, 2020 AWAC meeting to learn more about the circumstances that led to the large number of cats housed in the foster home. We were told that it was a temporary solution related to the unexpected intake of a large number of cats from an unfortunate situation.

We also inquired about the number of complaints the city has received about foster homes and understand that there have been no specific complaints about rescue groups or the conditions at foster homes.

### Recommendation

We do not recommend amending the by-law to impose a limit on the number of animals housed in foster homes connected to rescue groups that are registered with the city.

We recommend:

1. London Animal Care and Control and the Catty Shack provide temporary housing when rescue groups are faced with overflow animals, such as in emergency or hoarding situations.
2. Rescue groups should remind foster homes about the importance of having a plan to evacuate animals in the event of a fire or other emergency.
3. If necessary, a rescue group that maintains foster homes that are the subject of multiple complaints should be warned and/or placed on probation and/or have their registration revoked.

### Analysis

The City took a bold step forward in committing to end the euthanizing of healthy, adoptable animals who find themselves at London Animal Care and Control (LACC). It is a wonderful policy, but to see it succeed these animals need to have a place to go. Otherwise, the shelter will be forced to euthanize them in order to create space for incoming animals. Even when there is sufficient space, the city shelter is not adequate for pregnant or nursing moms and kittens, who may need to be housed together for up to eight weeks or more.

The solution to date has been for the animals to be moved from LACC to rescue groups, both local and in other cities. Rescue groups are charitable organizations that rely on donations and fundraisers for income, and do not have paid staff or a facility. Rescue groups are run by volunteers who work hard to maintain a network of private homes to foster and house animals. Volunteers and foster homes come and go, and there is always a shortage of both. Potential adopters often go to the foster home to meet the animal. Many pet supply stores regularly support rescue groups by holding an adoption day to facilitate adoptions.

It is noteworthy that the movement of animals between LACC and rescue groups is a one-way street. Animals only go from LACC to rescue groups. This is not the best use of available shelter space. While animals thrive better in a home than in a caged environment, there are situations where a large number of animals must be housed quickly. In these situations, any available spaces at LACC or the Catty Shack should be offered to the rescue group. This solution would provide housing without running the risk of overcrowding a private foster home, even on a temporary basis. In addition, creating a two-way street for animals would strengthen the partnership between LACC and rescue groups.

The fire at the foster home was a tragic incident, but it must be remembered that it was a unique situation. Foster homes are not generally causing a problem or generating complaints. Changing the rules for everyone based on one incident is overkill. The better response would be to discuss the issue with the rescue group involved to find a solution, and to warn or place that rescue group on probation if warranted.

Amending the by-law to limit the number of animals in foster homes will be difficult to enforce. Some foster homes will likely quit if they feel animal control officers could enter their home to count animals. This will further reduce the number of spaces available, and rescue groups may be forced to choose between violating the by-law and not assisting the animal. This would endanger the animal. It is also counter-productive to the city's policy of providing a safety net for healthy, adoptable animals.

If city council disagrees and chooses to amend the by-law to limit the number of animals in foster homes, we strongly recommend that LACC and the Catty Shack be required to make spaces available to rescue groups when needed. We further recommend that the limit not apply to kittens. Any foster home that is housing a number of animals greater than the limit when the by-law is passed should be permitted to keep those animals until they are adopted.