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Review

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Date of Completion

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2/24/2022

Date of Approval

DISTRIBUTION:

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Introduction

The Office of Inspector General has received numerous complaints over the years involving the City of Albuquerque's (City) Animal Welfare Department (AWD), which have resulted in several investigations. Some of these complaints have had similar fact patterns which have been the subject of previous investigations. In addition, over the past several months there have been several stories in the news involving AWD.

As a result, the OIG conducted a review into past investigations involving the AWD. The OIG looked at all AWD investigations from 2015 through 2021, focusing on the OIG's observations, assessments and findings during each of the investigations. The purpose of this review was to try and determine if there were any trends or similar issues that continued to resurface.

Background

During the time period reviewed, not only has there been a change in City Administration, but there have been several changes with the Directors heading AWD. During the time period reviewed, AWD has had four Directors and at least two individuals in an acting capacity. Some Directors possessed experience working with shelter animals or with animal organizations, while others came from an administrative background. AWD has also experienced a lot of turnover amongst its staff.

OIG Review Approach

The OIG reviewed all investigative reports involving AWD from 2015 through 2021. The OIG's preliminary objectives were to look at the observations, assessments and findings in each report to determine if there were trends or similar issues that continued to resurface. In its effort to identify any recurring themes, the OIG did make note of the following:

Review Summary

Documentation:

In an investigative report from 2015 (OIG 15-201), one of the OIG's findings was that AWD's documentation of information in their Chameleon database was inconsistent.

In an investigative report from 2019 (19-0006-I), the OIG reported findings of poor reporting and documentation practices throughout the years; in some instances, documentation was missing, lacking or in error. The OIG reported that details in the documentation lacked consistency in some cases, details in others, and improper codes were being entered.

Volunteers:

In addition to AWD employees, AWD has shelter volunteers who perform a variety of functions in an effort to contribute to the quality of life of the animals in AWD's shelters. However, there have been instances where there has been conflict between AWD employees and volunteers. There have been times when AWD employees expressed concerns that volunteers seemed to have a great

deal of power and influence and would be dismissive of AWD employees or would try to override decisions made by AWD employees about animals.

In an investigative report from 2015 (OIG 15-201), one of the OIG's findings was that there were no formal policies and procedures in place concerning the volunteers.

In an investigative report from 2021 (21-0002-R), the OIG recommended that volunteers be educated in their role as volunteers and their need to respect staff decisions. In addition, the OIG recommended that there be a separate volunteer and staff Code of Conduct/Ethics, as volunteers and AWD staff cannot be held to same standard.

In response to the 2021 investigative report, the current AWD Director has taken steps to make improvements, which included implementing an AWD Volunteer Code of Conduct and Ethics and an Acknowledgement of Receipt form that volunteers must sign, affirming that they have received the AWD Volunteer Code of Conduct and Ethics. The Director also implemented a Volunteer Disciplinary Action Form, which was used in three instances following implementation. In addition, problematic volunteers have been removed from the volunteer program.

Morale

In an investigative report from 2017 (OIG I17-102), one of the OIG's assessments was that based on employee complaints, there appeared to be dysfunction, low morale and a lack of confidence in Department leadership. The OIG suggested that this could negatively impact the effectiveness, efficiency and safety within the Department, which places both employees and animals at increased risk.

Employee morale has come into play in some of the other AWD investigations reviewed, and can sometimes be a challenge. However, as mentioned in the investigative report from 2017, and what remains true today, employees are the greatest resource in the AWD and it is essential to maintain high morale and confidence in leadership. This is best done by ensuring each employee understands their role and responsibilities and how their actions are valued and contribute to the success of the organization. Along these lines, they also need to be kept aware of external and internal factors impacting their role and responsibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

After reviewing ten (10) investigative reports from the past seven (7) years, which contained thirty-six (36) findings, observations and recommendations, the OIG found that there were three reoccurring issues that were identified in multiple investigations. The Department is not monitoring their procedures and practices that have been implemented as a result corrective actions to ensure that previously identified issues are being addressed adequately and consistently.

The OIG recommends that AWD:

1. Consider developing ongoing resolutions. Following the issuance of the OIG investigative reports, findings and recommendations, AWD identifies and corrects the issues referenced; however, the Department is not ensuring that these corrective actions remain. Consider conducting periodic monitoring of issues to ensure that they are being addressed adequately and consistently.

2. Consider having the AWD staff receive the proper onboarding, as well as refresher trainings, perhaps on an annual basis. AWD should maintain record of staff who received training and what training they received.

3. Consider having the Department and City policies and procedures be readily available for staff to review at any time. In addition, consider keeping updates through email, bulletin boards, SharePoint or other systems that allow for information to be readily available to staff to review and reference.

4. AWD Administration should consider having regular, documented staff meetings.

The OIG will continue to follow up on recommendations made and any corrective actions the Department is implementing.