



AGENDA

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cats (APGOCATS) Autumn Meeting Minutes

3pm-4.30pm, 24 October 2018, Room U, Portcullis House

Attendees:

- Steve Reed MP
- Lord Black of Brentwood
- David Drew MP
- Patricia Gibson MP
- Jacqui Cuff, Cats Protection
- Madison Rogers, Cats Protection
- Daisy Page, Battersea
- Scott Fryer, Battersea
- Steve Crow, Governing Council of the Cat Fancy
- Sam Watson, RSPCA
- Ellie White, Mind
- Libby Webb, Age UK
- Ian Pendlington, Independent Age

Apologies:

- Claire Bessant, International Cat Care
- Anna Wade, Blue Cross
- Vicki Betton, PDSA
- Malgorzata Faras, Mars Pet Care

Item	Speaker	Time
1. Welcome and opening remarks	Chair	3.00pm-3.05pm
2. Secretariat's report	Secretariat	3.05pm-3.15pm

- Minutes of last meeting
 - The group was particularly disappointed that since the last meeting Tracey Crouch MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society, responsible for Loneliness, has declined to attend an APGOCATS meeting. Steve Reed MP offered to get in touch with Tracey, as he is her Shadow Minister. However, now Tracey has resigned, the Group will look to engage with the new Minister.

- **Steve Reed MP provided an overview of the issue:**
 - The Government have recently announced their Loneliness strategy which follows on from the Jo Cox Commission, who have worked with Government although not everything the commission had recommended has been included.
 - The Government has not taken into consideration the impact that cuts and decreasing resources in communities has been having in society, especially on loneliness.
 - Within the strategy the Government have committed to introduce a loneliness test.
 - Cuts in Government funding is likely to continue with a 3.5bn shortfall projected and this could put further pressure on services which help loneliness.
 - However, not all services designed to combat loneliness are publicly funded- charities whom also do a great job providing these services, and animal charities can particularly help by rehoming animals to lonely people and providing services such as pet therapy.

- **Guest speaker: Ellie White, Mind**
 - Mind submitted evidence to the Jo Cox Commission.
 - There is a relationship between mental health and loneliness as people suffering from mental health can struggle to make social connections.
 - There is a large stigma around mental health in society with 9/10 people with mental health problems experiencing stigma.
 - Ellie suggested that there were social policy levers which could be used to make changes, especially in housing for people suffering from mental health problems and perhaps loneliness.
 - People with mental health problems can experience stigma from landlords which can make it difficult to secure good quality housing, in some cases people can be restricted from visitors which makes it hard to make social connections
 - People should be able to have a choice about housing, including if they want to own a pet.
 - However pets can create additional barriers to accessing housing which means that people can be forced to pick between accepting housing or giving up their pet. Another scenario is that people are forced to move to smaller properties which might not be as suitable for their pet. This can lead to struggles for people deciding what is the best option for them and this can then gravely affect an individual's mental health if they do end up having to give up their pet and they might experience loneliness.

- **Guest speaker: Libby Webb, Age UK**
 - Age UK inputted into the Jo Cox Commission and the Loneliness Strategy.
 - Loneliness is not the same as social isolation. An individual can feel lonely in a crowd.
 - Libby asserted that loneliness is not caused by age and is equally likely at any age. She noted there had been recent reports which suggested that young

people are the loneliest group of people but pointed out that a lot of the surveys were online which young people are more likely to take part in (BBC survey self-selecting).

- Loneliness is caused by circumstances/lifetime transitions which can include situations such as bereavement, onset of poor health, poor mental health and disability.
- Libby noted that one in three older people have a pet and of these people 50% have a cat, pet ownership decreases as people get older. She said that pet ownership can help older people through alleviating loneliness and giving them something to care for. The academic evidence regarding the benefits of pet ownership to loneliness is limited and mainly focuses on dogs. However, for older people cats could be a good pet option as they are less burdensome.
- On the flip side pets can lead to restrictions for older people such as where they can live.

- **Guest speaker: Ian Pendlington, Independent Age**

- The Chief Executive of Independent Age, Janet Morrison, is also the chair of the Campaign to End Loneliness .
- Ian referred to “If you’re lonely”, a leaflet about getting a dog and also to the benefits of schemes like “Befrienders” for those experiencing loneliness.
- The charity provides support to older people and does give advice around how to get pets.
- They have also worked on a bereavement campaign called “We need to talk about death”. The campaign found that losing a loved one can lead to a deterioration in someone’s mental health and they can also be more likely to experience loneliness.
- Ian noted that services to families for people who are ill can end when that person passes away and leaves the families without the needed support. Independent Age runs a scheme with volunteers who make connections with older people who might be feeling lonely.
- Ian acknowledged that pets were mentioned in the loneliness strategy and quoted research from Anchor housing which said 51% of people over 65 were worried about a future without their pet. He said that pets were good for loneliness and can help in a variety of settings including care homes. On this issue Blue Cross had found that 40% of care homes were pet friendly but this could be a resident pet or only pets like fish being allowed.

6. Roundtable discussion

Chair

4.00pm-4.25pm

The Group then had a discussion around the following questions:

- Who is experiencing loneliness?
- Why? At what life stages?
- How can cats fit into the loneliness challenge and bring about benefits to those experiencing loneliness?

- Steve Reed MP started the discussion by asking the group what should the Government do- especially inviting suggestions about legislative change which could be made.
- Care Bill (now Act)
 - Jacqui Cuff and Lord Black of Brentwood noted that they did some work on the care bill and specifically on individual care assessments to try and get pet care to be a consideration as part of an individual's care budget.
 - It was suggested that the group should ask some parliamentary questions to establish if an individual can spend their care budget on pet care.
 - Patricia Gibson said that this would have resource implications for local councils
 - Jacqui Cuff also said that providers tend to encourage people to choose packages rather than self-directing their care budget but Patricia Gibson noted this is not the case in Scotland and many people take up the option to self-direct their care budget.
- Social Prescribing
 - It was suggested that getting a cat could be something included by Doctors as part of social prescribing.
 - As a minimum posters/leaflets about adopting a pet could be displayed in doctors' surgeries.
 - Local authorities could share best practice amongst each other.
- Academic research
 - The limited amount of academic research was raised again and it was agreed that more quantitative research was needed.
 - It was suggested that the Loneliness strategy has a research budget and APGOCATS could bid for some to fund research.
- People giving up pets when their circumstances change
 - More could be done to challenge the blanket 'no pets' policies used in rented accommodation.
 - In other countries the Government have encouraged clauses that allow pets as a default in private rented accommodation.
 - Compulsion to allow pets could be enforced in social housing as local authorities and the LGA set the policies.
 - BDCH has done some research into the local authorities in London and found there is one which has a ban on pets.
 - RSPCA have provided pet friendly contracts and offer support to landlords who do allow pets. RSPCA Cymru have put together example contracts for the Welsh Government.
 - All charities noted they do have schemes to take people's pets when they pass away but none of the charities are able to provide respite care for pets.
 - It was also noted that housing is affecting young people's ability to own pets as many rented places do not allow pets.
- Volunteering
 - As well as getting a pet, people can also volunteer with animal charities
 - Steve Crow also said that fostering is an option for people who might be feeling lonely as well.

- Some charities also see older people adopting older cats which can be harder to rehome.
- Budget Autumn 2019
 - It was suggested by Steve Reed MP that the group could make an ask to the chancellor on the upcoming budget to re-ring-fence the care budget.
 - Daisy Page stated that pets can be a money saver- pet ownership in the UK save the NHS £2.45 billion.

7. Concluding remarks & future business Chair 4.25pm-4.30pm

A brief outline of the proposed structure for future discussion of loneliness/ next meetings.

- Future session topics suggested included:
 - loneliness in young people and how pets can help would be useful
 - academics to discuss the research gap
 - Social housing providers- LGA and National Housing Federation
 - Private housing representatives- National Landlords Association
 - Medical profession

8. AOB

- Steve Reed MP asked if there has been any progress on getting air guns licensed and if there was an opportunity to raise the issue during the next debate on the Offensive Weapons Bill. Madison Rogers said that licensing air guns had been put down as an amendment to the bill but withdrawn. Cats Protection will speak to MPs in favour of licensing to raise the issue during the next debate.

Actions:

- Steve Reed MP to contact Mims Davies MP (Tracey Crouch MP's successor) to invite her to come along to a meeting in 2019.
- Send a welcome letter to David Rutley MP.
- Write a briefing for the LGA to send to members on the new Animal Establishments Licensing Regulations.
- APGOCATS table parliamentary questions related to individual care assessments
- Investigate if APGOCATS is able to bid for the research funding available as part of the loneliness strategy.
- APGOCATS to get a question raised during the budget about how much money pets save the NHS and if the care budget can be re-ring-fenced.
- APGOCATS to arrange future session on the suggested topics and reach out to relevant speakers (Meeting date tbc early 2019).

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of APGOCATS will take place **Tuesday 26th February 2019, Room O, Portcullis House, 2-4pm**. This meeting will include the second session in the inquiry into loneliness and pet ownership.