



MINUTES

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cats (APGOCATS) - Spring Meeting

26 February 2018, 2pm-4pm, Room O, Portcullis House, Houses of Parliament

Attendees:

- Steve Reed MP
- Kevin Foster MP
- Scott Fryer, Battersea
- Hayley Chow, Battersea
- Jacqui Cuff, Cats Protection
- Madison Rogers, Cats Protection
- Myles Cummins, Cats Protection
- Prof. Christina Victor, Brunel University London
- Dr Sandra McCune, WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition
- Harriet Edwards, Samaritans
- Anna Wade, Blue Cross
- Claire Bessant, International Cat Care
- Steve Crow, Governing Council of the Cat Fancy
- Mandy Ryan, PDSA
- Vicki Betton, PDSA
- Livi Elsmore, Red Cross
- Andrew Fellows, Office of Victoria Prentis MP

Apologies:

- Lord Black of Brentwood
- Morgan Brobyn, Battersea
- Maria Caulfield MP
- Helena Cotton, BVA
- David Drew MP
- Patricia Gibson MP
- Daisy Page, Battersea
- Tommy Sheppard MP
- Sam Watson, RSPCA
- Mike Webb, Battersea

Item	Speaker	Time
1. Welcome and opening remarks	Chair	2.00pm-2.05pm
2. Secretariat's report	Secretariat	2.05pm-2.15pm
• Minutes of last meeting		

- Jacqui Cuff went through the minutes of the previous meeting and updates were given on the following points:
- Kitten checklist- Claire Bessant said the launch of the checklist was delayed due to the announcement that the Government are going to ban the third party sales (TPS) of kittens as this could affect some of the advice within the checklist. The TPS ban will be a statutory instrument but the ban will not come into force until next year. The issue is being further discussed at a meeting of the Canine and Feline Sector Group on 15th March. In light of this the checklist will now be launched before the ban comes into force.
- Care plans- Steve Reed MP offered to table the Parliamentary Questions written regarding the consideration of pets as part of care plans. Madison Rogers to send the questions to Steve Reed MP.
- Regulations- The group decided that a briefing for the Local Government Association on the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 was not needed anymore as the regulations had bedded in. Steve Crow said he had only had one more report from a breeder who had experienced issues which were resolved. The group will still feedback on the regulations for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- All other actions have been taken and the minutes were agreed.
- Website update
 - The website will be live in the next few weeks.
- Policy update
 - The Government will be introducing a ban on third party sales of kittens.

Correspondence received

Public Enquiry Point

2.15pm-2.20pm

- The Group has received a letter from a member of the public who suspects his Siamese cat, Clooney, was stolen. The member of the public wants it to be a legal requirement for cats to be scanned for a microchip and details checked when they are first registered at a veterinary surgery. The member of the public had carried out a Freedom of Information request with Police Forces across the UK to find out how big an issue pet theft was. The correspondence also mentioned that the member of public was attending an event on pet theft being hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group. Mandy Ryan mentioned that the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons do already encourage vets to scan for a microchip on first presentation and when pets are brought in for emergency treatment. A few members of the group said they were attending the pet theft event. Daisy Page to circulate the email to members.

3. Loneliness and pet ownership

Chair and Guest Speakers

2.20pm-3.05pm

Session two- Speakers gave their perspective on the issues associated with loneliness, and the impact of animal ownership.

Guest speaker: Prof. Christina Victor BA, M Phil, PhD, FAcSS, FFPH- Professor of Gerontology and Public Health, Vice Dean-Research, Leader, Ageing Studies Research Theme. Brunel University London

- Prof. Christina Victor set out that she is a social scientist with an interest in the social aspects of aging and people in their later stages of life.
 - Prof. Christina Victor started her career carrying out research in Powys in Wales, interviewing older people in socially isolated areas, however despite their location they never spoke about feeling lonely. Prof. Christina Victor followed this by saying it is important not to confuse social isolation and loneliness as they are separate issues.
 - The topic of loneliness has now become fashionable, before this it was thought to just be a problem of later life. Now there is recognition that loneliness affects people at all ages. ONS data shows that young people are the most likely to suggest they are lonely followed by older people. In context around 10% of young people and 10% of older people report loneliness.
 - Prof. Christina Victor said loneliness is something which everybody experiences as it is part of being human but some will experience enduring loneliness in their life time.
 - There are 3 different experiences of loneliness which someone can fall into:
 - Those experiencing it for the first time
 - People recovering from something in their life e.g. bereavement
 - Enduring loneliness e.g. mental health issues, dementia, limited mobility
 - It is very hard to disaggregate these different groups and interventions do not address the needs of each group specifically.
 - There is less sense of the communities in which lonely people live in and the infrastructure around them- there needs to be more focus on individuals and the social space they occupy.
 - Interventions are generally for older people and Brunel University did a review of interventions for adults through their What Works for Wellbeing Centre.
 - It was found that the research evaluating interventions was poor as it did not address sub-groups of society and it did not follow people over time to get longitudinal results.
 - The research did not include interventions for under 50s.
 - Since the Jo Cox commission there has been more work done on loneliness in other age groups.
 - Prof. Christina Victor said there was no research specifically related to cats as an intervention. There was some evidence for dogs, caged birds and robotic animals but this was of a poor quality. She agreed pets played a role on an individual basis.
 - Prof. Christina Victor finished speaking about medicalising loneliness and said it she did not believe that the issue could be solved simply with a pill. She was sceptical about social prescribing and said it was unlikely the NHS will be prescribing pets. Prof. Christina Victor felt there was poor evidence which linked loneliness and service use as there are many factors contributing to why people may want to access the NHS. She worried that there was a focus on treating loneliness to save money for the NHS, rather than the focus being concentrated on improving individual's wellbeing.
- **Guest speaker: Dr Sandra McCune VN, BA (Zoology), PhD-** Scientific Leader - Human-Animal Interaction, WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition
 - Dr Sandra McCune has worked with cats and dogs for over 25 years, she was brought up in a non-pet family but from a young age has volunteered at rescue shelters. Dr Sandra McCune trained as a vet nurse in Dublin. She undertook a degree in Zoology

at Trinity University and a PhD at the University of Cambridge which looked at the behaviours of confined cats.

- WALTHAM partnered with the National Institute of Health in America which has generated over \$12million to focus on research related to children and the health impacts of pets.
 - WALTHAM have been at the forefront of research in human Animal Interaction (HAI) and looks at both the positive and negative effects of pets. Research has been done in 15 countries and in the last few years there have been over 60 studies done which is starting to build up the scientific evidence in this area.
 - Dr Sandra McCune spoke in more detail about her PhD and the different behaviours that cats exhibit when they are confined, which can be split into 3 groups:
 - Stopping normal behaviour
 - Hiding behaviour
 - Disruptive behaviour
 - There were around 15% of cats which would experience these problems acutely and it was found that the social development of the cat and the friendliness of the dad cat impacted on their likeliness to react badly to being confined.
 - From this research, Dr Sandra McCune said it was very important for people to be aware of cats' needs as well as people's needs when assessing if someone who is lonely should get a cat. It was also important to get the right cat for the person and their environment.
 - Research has been done into HAI in America and Australia including a study which looked into social capital from pets and concluded that people are six times more likely to make a friend in a new area if they have a pet (including a cat). The effect was likened to that of a parent in a new area meeting other parents at the school gate when they collect their child. This connection then led to favour giving and helped build communities in a measurable way. Further research could be done to measure the effects against people without pets as prior research had no control group.
 - Other studies have also been done to measure HAI with children with autism and ADHD.
 - There have not been any specific studies looking at pet ownership and loneliness and research findings to date have been peripheral but the topic has been covered in wider pieces of encouraging research.
- **Guest speaker: Harriet Edwards-** Policy Manager, Samaritans
 - Harriet Edwards outlined that Samaritans is a suicide prevention charity which runs a helpline. The charity believe that all suicide is preventable. The services offered by Samaritans aims to decrease loneliness.
 - The charity has recently started to unpick the policy around the issue of loneliness and work out how best to input into the Government's agenda.
 - The charity has focused on loneliness in young people which is starting to be recognised and there is an increase in the same age group for the number of suicides and number of people self-harming.
 - Loneliness is one of the most common reasons for calls to the helpline and this is also reflected in visits to the GP.

- Loneliness is a feeling which is personal for each individual experiencing it and loneliness can be a significant factor which compounds other issues e.g. mental health, transitional periods in life. It is also unequal and some young people are more at risk of experiencing loneliness than others due to factors such as childhood trauma, bullying and social media.
- Social media can be a force for good and help some young people deal with loneliness but for others it can confound it. At transition times in young people's lives e.g. going to university, social media can lead to people comparing their lives with others in a similar position which can have negative effects if others' transitions are deemed to be more successful.
- From a literature review Samaritans has undertaken there is limited research on the link between loneliness and suicide. More research is needed.
- Even within the young person age group of 15-30 year olds there are different pressures faced by the young and older sections of the group which might be made worse by loneliness. ONS data has shown the older section of this group are the most likely people to be in rented accommodation out of all age ranges which can make them at risk of financial pressures. The young section of this age group are more likely to be going through exam pressure.
- There can be a build-up of risk factors and a stressful event can then lead to suicide.
- Research showed that 40% of young people wouldn't ask for help if they were feeling suicidal as they may be scared or believe there is nowhere to go for help. Often there is a perception that things cannot be changed and people also do not admit to all of the issues they face including loneliness.
- Samaritans is recommending social prescribing and Harriet believes that the public health available to address this issue should be wider and include the local community. There could also be changes made to the curriculum.
- Harriet Edwards concluded by referring to the 'prevention agenda'.

4. Roundtable discussion

Chair

3.05pm-3.50pm

The Group then had an opportunity to discuss 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?
- Chair:
 - Steve Reed MP reflected on the speaker's comments and said that more research was needed into how pets could help to combat loneliness. He noted there were conflicting views on the role of GPs and pets. Steve Reed MP said that housing was an issue mentioned at the previous meeting and praised the poster campaign Cats Protection had done in Westminster tube station to promote their Purrfect Landlords campaign which aimed to get more landlords to allow cats.
 - Red Cross:
 - The group was joined for the first time by Livi Elsmore from the Red Cross who runs the Secretariat for the APPG on Loneliness. Livi Elsmore said she was very interested

to hear about young people's experiences of loneliness as the issue doesn't just affect older people. The Red Cross has found that loneliness is experienced by people across all of their services, including refugees and asylum seekers, who often get overlooked. The charity has research coming out later in the year looking at life transitions. Livi Elsmore looks forward to hearing more from APGOCATS about how pet ownership and specifically cats could help loneliness.

- Research
 - Prof. Christina Victor referred to the community connectors services. She knew of an older man who worked with Connect after a bereavement and he adopted a cat which helped him make more connections in his community and build his confidence.
 - Dr Sandra McCune said survey evidence suggests that pet owners feel less lonely. However, there is not much research in peer reviewed journals. The English Longitudinal Survey of Aging (ELSA) has a question about pet ownership and its relationship to loneliness, however the type of pet is not distinguished. Jacqui Cuff suggested that this question could be asked in more depth in the future. Prof. Christina Victor said there is evidence to show a relationship for women who were lonely. Their loneliness was measured before they got a pet and then after buying a pet. They self-identified as less lonely. Many responses to loneliness are reactive (e.g. getting a pet because someone feels lonely) and more proactive research would be needed. This could include measuring the loneliness of pet owners compared to non-pet owners.
 - Prof. Christina Victor said the ELSA also asks people who are lonely what services (medical) they have accessed- however it is very hard to remember what was accessed over time and service use could also be for other reasons such as lack of mobility. A survey which started from a base line where some people were lonely and some were not would also be useful to more accurately compare if there was increased service use due to loneliness. Harriet Edwards asked if there was appetite to integrate research in this area. Prof. Victor answered saying there were some papers on loneliness and health use but not all of them used the same reporting method and a common set of measurement tools would be needed. Prof. Christina Victor believed that any Government funded research should be prescribed a particular measure so the data could be pooled.
- PAW report
 - Vicki Betton said that PSDA carry out their PAW report every year which surveys pet owners through YouGov. In the survey there are a few relevant questions on the topic of loneliness:
 - 81% of cat owners said their cat made them feel less lonely (this was 91% 18-24 age group and 70% for older people)
 - In the survey there was a free text box where people could write a little to explain their answer and phrases used in association with pets included; companionship, helping with the loss of a spouse, someone to talk to, less alone and less afraid.
 - 35% of owners said they got a cat to provide love and affection too
 - 26% of cat owners said they got a cat for companionship
 - 53% of cat owners said they left a loss of companionship when their cat died

- Social prescribing
 - Dr Sandra McCune said the medical profession do suggest to people to get a pet in some cases and gave the example of Jackie Kennedy, a Police Officer who was injured and went on to adopt an assistance dog. The dog helped her with daily tasks which Jackie felt helped save the NHS money as she did not need as much support from carers.
 - Prof. Christina Victor emphasised that it always has to be the best approach for the individual as pet ownership is not for everyone.
 - Steve Reed MP mentioned that there was a social prescribing pilot in his constituency and the results were being compared to another area where there was no pilot taking place. He said there needs to be more research to find out if a cat would be the right solution for lonely people.
 - Prof. Christina Victor said that she took part in the BBC loneliness experiment which asked how people define loneliness and she emphasised that language is important. Many people said that what as important is being cared for and caring for something else, which pets can help with. Jacqui Cuff said that for a lot of people a pet is a reason to get up in the morning. Harriet Edwards said link workers try and engage people with local groups or forums and animals can help to provide people with connections. The Men in Sheds campaign was also mentioned as a good example of this in practice.
- Housing
 - Steve Crow said his experience is with pedigree cats which he sells to others and understands that people value their cats as companion animals.
 - Steve Crow said circumstances can lead to people no longer being able to keep their cats and a friend of his who moved into sheltered accommodation was forced to give up her beloved cat after complaints from neighbours. Tragically she died a few months after giving up her cat.
 - Prof. Christina Victor said that it is the case that people moving into care homes cannot take their pets, and sometimes even their possessions. Anna Wade said that Blue Cross have homed cats to care homes and this has led to an increase in the number of children visiting the home showing the positive wider community impacts pets in care homes can bring.
 - Scott Fryer said that Battersea Dogs & Cats Home have a campaign to get more social landlords to allow pets and Cats Protection have a campaigns to try and get both private and social landlords to allow pets. For Battersea, 10% of the cats coming in are relinquished due to landlords not allowing pets. This is distressing for the owners and staff at rehoming centres.

5. Concluding remarks & future business Chair

3.50pm-4.00pm

- Guests from the medical and social work profession and rented housing sector will be invited to speak at the next meeting, which will also be the AGM.