



## MINUTES

### All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cats (APGOCATS) - Summer Meeting

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019, 3pm – 5pm, Room B, 1 Parliament Street

#### Attendees:

- Maria Caulfield MP
- Sheryll Murray MP
- Ross Thompson MP
- Lord Goddard
- David Drew MP
- Robert Courts MP
- Jake McKey- National Landlords Association
- Robin Hewings- Campaign to End Loneliness
- James McHugh- Peabody
- Jen Berezai- Advocats
- Caitlin de Jode- Lexington Communications representing Mars Pet Care
- Gillian Carrick- Freelance writer
- Anna Wade – Blue Cross
- Claire Bessant- International Cat Care
- Madison Rogers- Cats Protection
- Michael Webb – Battersea
- Scott Fryer - Battersea
- Hayley Chow - Battersea

#### Apologies:

- Daisy Page, Battersea
- Lord Black of Brentwood

Item	Speaker	Time
1. <b>Welcome and opening remarks</b>	Chair	3:00pm-3:05pm
2. <b>Secretariat's report</b>	Secretariat	3:05pm-3:15pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minutes of last meeting               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Madison Rogers went through the minutes of the previous meeting and the minutes were agreed.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Website update               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Website is now complete and can go live as the relevant paperwork has been signed by all the data partners.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Policy update</li> </ul>		

- Five-year sentences for animal Cruelty – the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill 2019 was laid in Parliament on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Once the Bill is passed it will raise the maximum sentences for animal cruelty offences from six months to five years imprisonment. It will have its third reading on 4<sup>th</sup> September.
- Cat microchipping – The Government will imminently commence its review of the 2015 Microchipping of Dogs Regulations. The Government has also announced that they will do a call for evidence on the microchipping of cats following the Pet Identification Westminster Hall debate which took place on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019 The group agreed to write to DEFRA to show their support for the compulsory microchipping of owned cats.

**3. AGM** Michael Webb 3:15pm-3:25pm

- Election of officers
  - Maria Caulfield MP re-elected to the position of Chair
  - David Drew MP re-elected to the position of Secretary
  - Lord Goddard re-elected to the position of Vice Chair
  - Sheryll Murray MP elected to the position of Vice Chair
  - Ross Thompson MP elected to the position of Vice Chair
- Officers elected in Absentia:
  - Steve Reed MP re-elected to the position of Co-Chair
  - Lord Black of Brentwood re-elected to the position of Vice Chair
  - Layla Moran MP re-elected to the position of Treasurer
  - Patricia Gibson MP re-elected to the position of Vice Chair
  - Victoria Prentis MP re-elected to the position of Vice Chair
  - Rehman Chishti MP elected to the position of Vice Chair
- Annual Accounts
  - Maria Caulfield MP proposed, and Sheryll Murray MP seconded the expenditure by Battersea Dogs & Cats Home and Cats Protection for costs related to the running of APGOCATS

**4. Correspondence received** Public Enquiry Point 3:25pm-3:30pm

- There has been no new correspondence received by the group since the previous meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> February.

**5. Loneliness and pet ownership** Chair and Guest Speakers 3:30pm-4:15pm

The different guest speakers each gave their perspective on the issues associated with loneliness, the impact of animal ownership on people, properties and communities.

The notes given here reflect the guest speakers' contributions and are delivered without comment from APGOCATS.

- **Guest speaker: Jake McKey** - Policy & Public Affairs Officer, National Landlords Association (NLA)
  - Jake McKey said that cats in the rented sector are increasingly on the radar for landlords and Cats Protection's Purrfect Landlords campaign has been a good platform to launch the issue to them.

- The NLA represents the private rented sector for 42,000 members and a poll showed that 2/3 of their landlords didn't know tenants wanted pets.
  - The Association has worked to highlight pet ownership in the private rented sector, providing information to members through means such as podcasts. Recently, the NLA, Cats Protection and Advocats did a podcast on the topic of pets to bring the issue to national attention.
  - The Association has promoted allowing pets in accommodation by making a business case to members, showcasing how people with pets tend to rent accommodation for longer and accept higher rents as they have less choice.
  - The new Tenant Fees Act 2019, has proved to be challenging for landlords looking to mitigate that effects of pets in rented accommodation. The new Act caps allowable deposits at 5 weeks of rent, which has put off many landlords from renting to people with pets as previously landlords have charged extra deposits for pets The NLA had asked the Government to cap allowable deposits at 6 weeks.
  - To combat this the Association has worked to myth bust the perceived risks attached to having pet owners as tenants.
  - The new Act has meant that the biggest stumbling block for pet owning tenants is the starting of a tenancy.
  - Dogs are seen to be a greater issue than cats due to anti-social behaviour. However, the majority of the data available to the Association is anecdotal. The Association are currently looking to conduct dedicated research to fill the evidence gap of allowing pets in rented accommodation. Mr McKey has offered to share this information with APGOCATS.
  - Sheryll Murray MP said that this information would be very helpful. She added that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the benefits of pet owning tenants to landlords and time is needed for the new legislation to bed in.
- **Guest speaker: James McHugh** - Planning and Policy Manager, Peabody
    - Peabody has approximately 66,000 properties, with the majority of these being social housing. They are a single landlord so they can set their own policy for all of their properties.
    - The highest levels of self-reported incidents of loneliness at Peabody are at either end of the age spectrum.
    - Pet ownership is allowed as standard, however specific conditions have to be met, for example, tenants are only allowed a maximum of two cats per household; in part because hoarding is considered a risk.
    - The organisation has seen an increase in the number of requests for wellbeing animals and with sufficient evidence will accommodate these requests.
    - James McHugh said that the 'Pet Friendly Properties' report from Battersea on pets in social housing has been useful.
    - As with the NLA, the majority of evidence is anecdotal, with the major issue being anti-social behaviour with dogs e.g. fouling. However, there are several issues for cats, such as cat hording and health concerns, for example tenants replacing fire doors, or illegal breeding.

- However, having pets can negatively affect the uptake of new homes for social tenants if they do not meet the policy requirements. This is particularly the case around Peabody's programme of mutual exchange – as if one tenant looking to exchange (or both) has a pet then the mutual exchange is not possible unless both properties are suitable for a pet. People are rejecting exchanges as a result; creating a difficulty for the Association.
  - This is evident as a lot of pets in properties are kept under the radar, with only responsible owners seeking permission to keep their pets.
  - This is Peabody's experience however, it should be understood that there are differences between social landlords with many having different policy for keeping pets.
  - Maria Caulfield MP asked James McHugh if the Association allowed pets for tenants in their sheltered housing. He replied and said that the association takes pets in this type of housing on a case by case basis.
  - Maria Caulfield MP also asked if Peabody have discussions with other housing associations. James McHugh said that they do reflect on their policy with other Housing Associations. He added that the Battersea report found there was inconsistency of practice amongst housing associations and sometimes it can be a case of different opinions being found within an association, making it hard to achieve a consensus on pets.
- **Guest speaker: Robin Hewings** - Director of Campaigns, Policy and Research, Campaign to end Loneliness
    - The aim of the charity is to bring together organisations and academics to tackle the issue of loneliness; which affects all demographics.
    - The charity has existed for 9 years, is funded by the National Lottery Communities Fund and hosted by Independent Age.
    - The interest in the issue of loneliness has increased in the last few years but the evidence base has not been developed.
    - Over a million older people are affected by loneliness with the largest issue being bereavement. This contrasts with young people where the biggest issue is periods of change. Other common issues include poverty, retirement, deprivation and poor physical health.
    - Reflecting on previous discussions the group has had with other experts, Robin Hewings noted that pets can help individuals (especially women) with loneliness.
    - The Campaign is focusing on three main areas to stop loneliness:
      - Self-help – this is one area where pet ownership would sit, as it is the individual taking proactive steps to self-medicate
      - Social prescribing – This could take many forms but would be initiated on the recommendation of a specialist. It could include 6-12 sessions with a professional or specific recommendations, such as pet ownership.



- Maria Caulfield MP asked if the recent reports from Battersea and Cats Protection were helpful to improve housing providers policy.
  - Jake McKey stated that they have helped to create a business case.
  - James McHugh stated that they are very useful for internal lobbying and providing an evidence base for change.
- Maria Caulfield MP asked if there were any other ways to bring people together e.g. looking after others pets.
  - Robin Hewings stated that social media can be a useful tool in connecting people if utilised in the correct way.
  - Anna Wade said that Blue Cross is hosting a conference on pets and loneliness and they would love a representative from APGOCATS to be there.
- Maria Caulfield MP asked what the guests would like to see Government and Parliament do to help the problems outlined.
  - James McHugh said that the availability of local health services is a problem for hoarders and more needs to be done to address the stigma of social housing.
  - Jake McKey said the Government can promote their 'How to Rent' guides.
  - Robin said that pets can be part of social prescribing. More could be done to help people see the resources that they have.
- Maria Caulfield MP concluded by asking how people who already had a cat might be affected by the Tenants Fees Act.
  - Jake McKey said that landlords want to keep their tenants and they probably would be allowed to keep their cat.
  - Maria Caulfield MP said that the group could table some Parliamentary questions to probe around the Tenants Fees Act and increase the profile of Pet CVs.

**7. Concluding remarks & future business**    Chair 4:30pm-4:40pm

- Battersea will now draft the report based on the evidence sessions ahead of the next meeting that is planned for October 2019.