



**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cats (APGOCATS)
September 2020 Extraordinary General Meeting
1.30pm-2.30pm, 10th September 2020, Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

Attendees

Sheryll Murray MP (Chair)
Lord Black of Brentwood
Dr. Lisa Cameron MP
Sarah Champion MP
Rosie Cooper MP
Lord Goddard of Stockport
Claire Bessant, ICC
Steve Crow, GCCF
Scott Fryer, Battersea
Ben Parker, Battersea
Madison Rogers, Cats Protection
Emma Tipton, PDSA
Anna Wade, Blue Cross

Apologies

Patricia Gibson MP
Andrew Gwynne MP
Layla Moran MP
Henry Smith MP
Mandy Ryan, BVA

1. Welcome and opening remarks Sheryll Murray MP - Chair

2. Approval of minutes from previous meeting Sheryll Murray MP - Chair
Minutes were approved by the group

3. EGM Ben Parker – *Secretariat*
Election of Co-chair. Ben Parker highlighted that Andrew Gwynne MP had sent his apologies and had agreed that he was happy to be elected in absentia. The chair forwarded the motion that Andrew be made co-chair of the group. All parliamentarians in attendance supported the motion.

Andrew Gwynne MP elected as Co-chair of the group.

4. Secretariat & Policy Update Madison Rogers - *Secretariat* 1.50pm-2pm
- Animal Welfare Charities and Covid-19

Madison Rogers from Cats Protection provided an overview of the challenges animal charities have faced due to Covid-19, outlining that:

- Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH) survey showed 56% of rescues suffered a drop of over half their incomes indicating a significant financial impact.
- Battersea, Blue Cross and Cats Protection are all offering hands-free rehoming following the easing of lockdown restrictions. Sheryll Murray MP used this service to rehome a cat from Cats Protection and found it a very positive experience.
- Covid-19 restrictions resulted in a reduction in preventative veterinary services with only emergency procedures taking place which has meant a reduction in the number of cats that

were able to be neutered. This has resulted in an increase in the number of kittens this year, with estimates of over 80,000 kittens expected to be born.

- Microchipping was also paused which could have future implications on lost cats. Veterinary practices are now trying to resume these practices again.
- Members of APGOCATS worked closely with DEFRA through the Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG) to produce advice and guidance to assist pet owners and pet businesses during the lockdown period.
- Organisations saw an increase in demand for pets during the lockdown period. The online advertising of pets has allowed unscrupulous sellers to exploit this market. Members of APGOCATS have been supporting the Government's Petfished campaign to try and encourage responsible buying practices.
- Introduction of Lucy's Law in April banning commercial sale of puppies and kittens under 6 months old.
- Consultation on microchipping of owned cats closed early this year. The results of the consultation have been delayed by Covid-19 but we are hoping to hear from the Government by the end of the year.
- Ben Parker from Battersea added that the Animals Welfare (Sentencing) Bill which aims to introduce tougher sentences for animal cruelty is due to have its Second Reading on 23rd October. It was introduced by Chris Loder MP as a Private Member's Bill.
- Ben highlighted that several animal welfare organisations had co-signed a joint letter to the EFRA Committee to call for an inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on the companion animal sector. This has been positively received by the chair of the committee with an indication an inquiry may be taken forward later in the year or early next year.

5. Loneliness report post-launch update Scott Fryer – *Secretariat* 2pm-2.10pm
(Cats as Companions: Can Cats Help Tackle Loneliness?)

Scott Fryer from Battersea updated the group that the report was launched during Loneliness Week in June. The report was very well received, with media pieces in Country Living and the Daily Star and generating a number of radio interviews. It also had quite a lot of interest from MPs, including Elliot Colburn MP who followed up by tabling a PQ in relation to the benefits of tackling loneliness for the NHS and for cost savings for the health service. This generated a positive response from Minister Victoria Prentis MP, who said that DEFRA officials will engage with the Department of Health and Social Care in relation to any actions they wish to take relating to those aspects and recommendations in the report. **ACTION: Secretariat to follow up with Elliot's office on this opportunity.**

Follow up to the report: Several group members raised the idea of holding an event on the parliamentary estate to launch the report in the future. **ACTION: The group will continue to monitor the suitability of the external environment for such a launch.**

6. Next steps for the group Anna Wade - *Secretariat* 2.10pm-2.20pm

Going forward, APGOCATS is planning on engaging with stakeholders on the recommendations from the loneliness report. As part of this, the group plan on reaching out to other APPGs where there may be some overlapping themes, for example with the APPG for Loneliness.

APGOCATS is also looking at hosting a roundtable in early 2021 to look in more detail at the housing issue – with recommendations around encouraging more pet friendly housing. This will be done in conjunction with the National Office of Animal Health (NOAH).

Lastly the group will be reviewing its list of relevant policy areas to ensure it remains up-to-date. As well as the themes of housing and pet friendly policies and cats and loneliness, the list also includes:

- Air guns and cat shootings
- Animal cruelty sentencing
- Breeding and sale of cats
- Effectiveness of microchipping
- Electronic shock collars and containment devices
- Government policy on animal welfare and its impact on cats

7. AOB

Chair

2.20pm-2.25pm

- Sarah Champion MP voiced concerns around the potential for a rise in abandonment cases – this is something that members are concerned about and will be monitoring closely in the coming months.
ACTION: Sarah Champion offered to table parliamentary questions in relation to animal cruelty sentencing. Secretariat to pick up with Sarah separately.
- Sheryll Murray MP called for MPs to help raise the profile of hands-free / virtual rehoming so members of the public better understand that they can still rehome a pet, they don't have to buy. Lord Goddard suggested writing an article in The House magazine to highlight the impact of lockdown on animal welfare organisations and the virtual rehoming services available. **ACTION: Secretariat to work with Lord Goddard and the group Chair to explore ways of taking this forward.**
- Steve Crow added that GCCF are concerned about the rise in backyard breeding, exploiting the explosion in demand for pedigree cats during lockdown.
- Lord Black asked if there are any Brexit issues that will specifically affect cats. Scott Fryer outlined the current arrangements with the PETS travel scheme and the Balai Directive, and how these have been used by dealers to bring kittens into the country during lockdown. The group is monitoring developing Brexit arrangements in relation to pets and will support the communication of changes to our stakeholders.
- Battersea is running the Purr Minister competition again this year and are encouraging entries.