



## MINUTES

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

#### November 2024 Inaugural Meeting

Policy discussion and election of officers, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024 (11.30-12.00), Room W3, Houses of Parliament

#### Attendees:

- Johanna Baxter MP
- Cat Eccles MP
- Mohammad Yasin MP
- Lord Black of Brentwood
- Lord Goddard of Stockport
- Caitlin Moloney- Office of Ruth Jones MP
- Ben Parker - Battersea Dogs and Cats Home
- Richard Clare - Battersea Dogs and Cats Home
- Ruby Dimelow-Steel - Battersea Dogs and Cats Home
- Annabel Berdy - Cats Protection
- Charlotte Broad - Cats Protection

#### 1) Secretariat & Policy Update

##### a) Pet Smuggling – Annabel Berdy (AB)

AB discussed the issue of cat and kitten smuggling, highlighting the previous Bill in the last parliamentary session – the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill. It was noted that it was welcomed that the Bill would have: 1) banned the importation of cats under six months of age, 2) Banned the importation of heavily pregnant cats, 3) Banned the importation of cats which have been declawed. Attendees discussed reasons for pet smuggling including high profits which are now common with selling cats, with them sometimes selling for thousands of pounds. AB stressed that it was important that legislation to tackle pet smuggling is brought forward quickly.

AB discussed that a new Private Member's Bill (with the same title) has been brought forward and is due for its Second Reading on 29 November 2024. However, it is unlikely to be successful unless it receives government backing. Attendees discussed how this was a government manifesto commitment and considered vehicles by which a pet smuggling Bill could be brought forward. It was further discussed how the group could make tackling cat and kittens smuggling an area of focus, ensuring that cats and kittens are included in any measures brought forward to prevent pet smuggling.

##### b) Cat Breeding – Annabel Berdy

AB showed attendees a photo of a bully cat (which are being sold by some sellers on online selling and social media platforms) to highlight the need for cat breeding regulations to stop the breeding of cats with extreme characteristics that cause pain and suffering.

AB noted that these cats have raised serious welfare concerns. The lack of fur will predispose these cats to skin disease and breeding for shortened legs will lead to joint abnormalities which will result in arthritis in many of these cats. Breeding for deformity causes unacceptable suffering and distress and prevents these cats from carrying out normal behaviours essential for their welfare. AB highlighted how these cats have received media attention over these concerns. AB discussed how cats are even being offered for worldwide shipping, and attendees agreed that it is awful to think of any animal being transported in such a way.

AB explained that sadly there is little protection for cats being bred, and it is concerning there is a rising trend towards harmful body types which cause cats pain and suffering.

AB highlighted how Cats Protection is calling on the government to regulate cat breeding as a licensable activity. This must include a ban on the breeding of cats with extreme characteristics which could have a detrimental effect on their health or welfare or that of their offspring. Conditions of the licence should also require that, for example, a cat should have no more than six litters in their lifetime.

#### **c) Pet-Friendly Housing – Ben Parker (BP)**

BP discussed how the Renters' Rights Bill, which has finished its Committee Stage in the House of Commons and is awaiting its Report Stage date to be announced, has a provision that will stop landlords from unreasonably refusing requests for pets. It was noted that this provision in the Bill is welcomed by the sector. It was mentioned how housing issues are an ongoing reason why pets are brought into both Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and Cats Protection and that this Bill was a positive step forward and must be brought forward quickly.

BP noted how Battersea Dogs and Cats Home had tried to work with parliamentarians to amend the Bill in Committee Stage in a number of ways including, for example, by trying to get the Bill to also extend to existing tenancies rather than just new ones (as the Bill is currently drafted). BP discussed how they had been unsuccessful with such amendments but that they hoped to try again at Report Stage and, if not, at the Bill's House of Lords stages.

#### **d) Electronic shock collars – Richard Clare (RC)**

RC discussed how electronic shock collars can be used on cats as well as dogs and how people aren't always aware of this. RC mentioned how the use of such collars are known to lead to behavioural problems and to break down the trust between owner and pet. BP noted how the Electronic Shock Collar Regulations were laid as a draft affirmative procedure in the last parliament and were due to come from 1st February 2024. However, while the statutory instrument had its necessary stage in the Lords in June 2023, it hadn't received a date for the Delegated Legislation Committee debate in the House of Commons, and therefore, the regulations timed out.

Attendees discussed opposition to these measures from groups that are concerned about sheep worrying. It was discussed how these concerns could be addressed through responsible ownership, for example, by keeping dogs on leads.

Attendees discussed how these regulations could easily be brought back and it would simply take the government to re-lay the SI. The government's current position on this was also discussed – noting that recent PQs have stated that the government is considering available evidence around the use of electronic collars and their effects on the welfare of animals. BP discussed concerns around evidence that had been presented from those against the collars. It was discussed what could be done by members of the APPG to encourage the government to re-lay the regulations without delay, including tabling PQs.

## **2) Election of Officers**

*Officers duly elected as follows:*

Johanna Baxter MP– elected to position of Chair

Cat Eccles MP– elected to position of Vice Chair

Lord Black of Brentwood – elected to position of Vice Chair

Lord Goddard of Stockport – elected to position of Vice Chair

## **3) AOB**

Members discussed future work streams and meetings throughout the next year. It was noted that the secretariat would be in touch to discuss the next meeting for the group in due course.

The secretariat would circulate PQs on areas discussed at the meeting.

Members discussed the Road Traffic Act (RTA) 1988 and how under section 170 of the Act, a driver is required to stop & report accidents involving specific animals including dogs, but not cats. Cats Protection and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home discussed their respective positions on this, and it was noted that this could be discussed in greater detail at future meetings.

Members also discussed the Competition and Markets Authority review of the vet sector and when we can expect the results of that review. The secretariat noted to look into this and update attendees.

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