

## Consultation on the “Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats”

### Response from the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF)

The GCCF welcomes the consultation and the opportunity to comment on the above named document. We are pleased that Defra have developed this code of practice and believe it to be a necessary and positive step in improving the welfare of the domestic cat in the UK.

The draft code of practice has been considered by the GCCF's Genetics Committee, which submits the following comments and recommended changes on behalf of the GCCF Executive Committee.

We would like to be sure of the intended audience? We have assumed that the code is aimed principally at the general pet cat owning public, in addition that it can be used by bodies such as the GCCF, the RSPCA, Cat Protection and cat rescue organisations to help publicise good cat husbandry and to strengthen the messages promoted by these organisations to educate and encourage the British public to adopt sensible and responsible practice which ensures their pet cat is kept healthy and safe. Is it intended that manufacturers of cat food, cat litter and other products aimed at the cat owning public should be encouraged to support and promote the code? We think this would be a worthwhile policy for Defra to pursue.

We believe it would be good practice to include an opening statement in the code which expresses this overall aim/objective.

All suggested amendments are shown in ***bold italics***.

**Page 4.** Summary Section 1, under “Travel” - We would suggest the following amendment:

Cats should not be left unattended in a vehicle ***for any significant length of time (ie. more than 15-20 minutes) and then only in cool weather.*** In warm ***or sunny*** weather this ***can be life threatening.***

We fully support the statement but feel that our amendment will clarify that leaving a cat unattended for a short time in normal weather conditions in order that the driver of the car may take a toilet or refreshment break at a service station for example, is acceptable practice and would not cause the cat harm

**Page 8.** Part 2, Section 1, Para 1.4, 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet-point - We suggest the following addition:

They are therefore in danger of eating poisons such as paints, ***white-spirit***, weed-killers, lily pollen, etc. ***Anti-freeze is also highly poisonous to***

***animals and must never be added to water in water-bowls, bird-baths, etc to prevent it freezing in very cold weather.***

We have encountered a number of examples of people putting anti-freeze into water in bowls or bird baths to prevent it from freezing in very cold weather. These people seem unaware that anti-freeze is poisonous to wild birds and to cats, dogs and other animals who may drink from such water-dishes and bird-baths. We also think it would be sensible and valuable to add a list of the main household substances toxic to cats, along with a list of the more common poisonous house and garden plants, as an annex to the Code of Practice.

**Page 8.** 1.6. - We suggest the following amendment:

It *is* safer to keep cats indoors at night, when risks to their health and welfare are often greater. ***Unless a cat is used to living outside the majority of the time, it will not cause a cat any stress to be kept in at night; it is not good practice to let cats out at night and if avoided from a young age a cat will be conditioned not to expect to go out at night.***

**Page 9.** Toileting Advice. 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet-point. – We suggest the following amendment:

- cats do not like to use heavily soiled areas, so the tray should be cleaned daily and regularly disinfected. The disinfectant ***used should be safe for cats and must not contain Phenol or Cresol which are highly poisonous to cats; all disinfectants must be thoroughly rinsed off.***

**Page 9,** 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> bullet-points – we suggest deleting the current wording for both; it is not necessary or practical to provide one litter tray per cat in a multi-cat household. Two cats will share a litter tray if regularly cleaned, however where three (or more) cats live together two trays (or more, depending on the total number of cats) would be necessary. We suggest the following wording be substituted:

- ***Sufficient litter trays should be available for the number of cats in the household and each litter tray must be refreshed daily if it has been used. Where there are several cats in a household a choice of litter trays should be available and accessible at all times; it is desirable to locate these in different parts of the house so the cats can get to them easily. It is sensible to keep the litter tray(s) in the same place so that the cat(s) know where to find them when they need them.***

**Page 10.** Para 2.5. We suggest the following amendment:

Cats have to eat certain proteins, vitamins and fatty acids only available from meat or commercially prepared cat food. They also have a higher protein requirement than other species such as dogs ***and should never be fed***

**commercial dog food. A totally home-made diet is inadvisable as it will lack key vitamins, minerals and trace-elements added to commercially prepared cat food, although feeding fresh meat is perfectly acceptable it should always be supplemented regularly with a commercially prepared complete cat food to ensure the full range of vitamins and trace elements are consistently available. Cat owners should be sure that any dried cat food given is a complete food; this will be stated on the label or packaging.**

**Page 10.** Para 2.7. We suggest the following amendment:

**An obese cat is an unhealthy cat.** Some cats may overeat and become overweight leading to a reduced quality of life. Obesity can lead to a whole host of health problems, including heart disease and diabetes. ***The ideal weight for an adult domestic cat of average size is between 3 and 4 kilograms (6½ and 9 lbs) for a female and 4 to 6 kilograms (9 to 13 lbs) for a male. Larger breeds such as the Maine Coon may be up to 8 kilograms in the case of an adult male. Any cat of average size/build weighing more than 9 kilos (20 lbs) is significantly overweight.***

**Page 11.** Para 2.9 – We applaud the detailed guidance given here to help cat owners assess the health of their pet. However we suggest the following amendment: to the 1<sup>st</sup> bullet-point under “Ideal”

- Well-proportioned – ***in line with the breed standard if a pedigree cat; for a household (non-pedigree) pet your cat should feel firm and muscular and look sleek with a glossy shine to the coat.***

Under “Too heavy” the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet-point ends in the middle of a sentence with the word “and...” What wording is intended to follow here?

**Page 12.** Para 2.13, 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet-point. It is not good practice to leave wet food around the house or garden, especially in warm weather as it will attract flies and other insects or animals (such as stray or feral cats, foxes, hedgehogs, etc.) which may harbour disease. Therefore we suggest the following amendment:

- ***Make sure that clean, fresh water is available and accessible at all times, in a multi cat household it is advisable to have two or more water-bowls situated in different parts of the house. Uneaten wet commercial cat food or fresh meat or fish should be removed if not eaten within 15-20 minutes; uneaten wet food will attract flies and other insects/animals which may harbour disease. A bowl of dried complete cat food may be left available to your cat at all times.***

**Page 13.** Section 3: Para 3.4. We are concerned that kittens may be sold or given to new owners at an unsuitably young age. The GCCF requires all breeders of pedigree cats who register kittens with us to agree only to sell kittens that are fully vaccinated and at least 13 weeks of age. This ensures

kittens are fully socialised, able to look after themselves and protected against viruses that cause serious illness, such as cat flu and Feline Leukaemia Virus. It also minimises the likelihood that a kitten will grown into a nervous, shy and possibly unaffectionate or even aggressive, adult. However, it is perfectly normal for a kitten or cat to be nervous and wary when entering a new environment and as such it may hide for the first day or two until it has explored, recognised that there is no immediate danger and gained confidence. We therefore suggest the following amendment:

Adult cats that have not had these early experiences may find it difficult to cope with day-to-day family life. They may find it stressful and be very nervous, hiding away a great deal of the time. A kitten ***should not go to its new home until at least 13 weeks old and should be fully vaccinated before leaving its birth home***, it is up to the owner or breeder of the litter to ensure that the kittens are well socialised if they are to develop into confident, happy pet cats. ***It is perfectly normal for a kitten or cat to be nervous and wary when entering a new home and it may hide for the first day or two until it has explored, recognised that there is no immediate danger and gained confidence in its new environment.***

**Page14.** Para 3.7 - We suggest the following addition:

Cats respond to stress in different ways and it is important that you can recognise any changes in the behaviour of your cat. ***In pedigree breeds there can be noticeable differences in character between different breeds, for example Siamese and many Foreign breeds are particularly lively and outgoing and can be more vocal, in contrast the British and Persian breeds are quieter and often more sedate.*** In most cases, where cats are afraid, they prefer.....

**Page 14.** Para 3.10. 11<sup>th</sup> bullet-point – Many pedigree breeds are very demonstrative and affectionate, and breeders select for such temperament and well as for type. Therefore we suggest the following amendment:

- Being unusually ***submissive and*** affectionate;

**Page 15.** Para 3.14 – We suggest the following addition:

....Indoor cats can also find mental stimulation in feeding from “puzzle feeders” that release dried food gradually. Thread, ***thin string and elastic bands are not suitable toys for cats*** and can cause serious intestinal problems if mistakenly ingested.

Para 3.15 – Amend to read:

Avoid using your hands and feet ***as a play-thing*** when playing with your cat as this may encourage aggressive behaviour in your pet when, for example, someone tries to stroke it.

**Page 16.** Section 4: Para 4.3 - We suggest the following additions:

Cats can form social groups with other cats that they have grown up with or know well, but will feel very threatened by cats outside this well-known group. The tolerance of cats towards other cats also varies with their early experiences **and breed** (see Section 3), so their ability and desire to socialise can vary enormously. It is, therefore, best not to keep too many cats together **in close confinement**, especially if they do not have access to the outside.

**Page 17.** Para 4.7. We suggest the following addition to the end of the paragraph:

....All boarding catteries must be licensed by law. When someone else is looking after your cat they are responsible for its welfare and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have. ***Ideally they should aim to spend a little time each day sitting with the cat and if possible stroking or playing with it.***

**Page 18.** Para 5.2. We suggest the following amendment to the 1<sup>st</sup> bullet-point and the 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet-point:

- Prevention of disease. There are various vaccinations that are designed to protect your cat(s) from certain diseases; ***vaccinations generally need boosting annually.***
- Prevention of parasite problems – many worming and flea preparations are available. Your veterinary surgeon, ***pet care specialist or GCCF website*** will be able to advise you about which are most suitable for your cat;

**Page 19.** Para 5.4. We consider that this paragraph should be in the Behaviour section, or should at least have a sentence in Behaviour referring the reader to this paragraph.

Para 5.5. The GCCF is strongly of the opinion that people should be encouraged to neuter all cats not specifically intended for breeding and would like to strengthen the guidance, so we suggest the following amendment:

One particularly important consideration is preventing the birth of unwanted kittens ***so unless you specifically intend to breed you should always neuter your cat. Raising a litter of kittens, whether pedigree or non-pedigree, is a serious responsibility – are you prepared to keep the kittens until they are old enough to safely leave their mother at 13 weeks? Kittens should go to their new home fully weaned, litter-trained, and fully vaccinated, are you prepared for the expense of feeding and paying for vaccinations? Finally are you able to sell the kittens or find them good homes and are you prepared to keep them until homes are found? If not, please neuter your cat.***

***A cat can become sexually active from about 4 months old and can be neutered from this age onwards;*** your veterinary surgeon will be able to

advise you about the best age for neutering your particular cat. With female cats ***it is advisable to have them neutered as soon as they are old enough, it is not necessary to let your cat have “just one litter” and she will suffer no harm at all if she is neutered before her first season.***

5<sup>th</sup> bullet-point. We would like to strengthen this point by adding the following:

- Un-neutered male cats are more likely to wander and to fight. Neutering them ***significantly reduces the risk of cuts and scratches resulting from fighting, these can become infected resulting in abscesses. Wandering males are at considerable risk of injuries and even death*** caused by road traffic accidents;

**Page 20.** Para 5.5. cont.....We suggest the following amendments:

If you decide not to have your cat neutered and wish to breed from it, there are a number of considerations to be taken into account. These include:

- Finding suitable homes for the kittens (***as stated above***);
- Health screening to ensure that the parents do not carry ***a virus*** or any inherited ***genetic*** defects which may be passed on to their offspring. ***For advice and guidance on testing please consult the GCCF or FAB websites and/or your veterinary surgeon.*** You should carefully consider whether your cat is a good candidate for breeding and you should discuss this with your veterinary surgeon ***in terms health and condition.***
- ***If your cat is a pedigree breed you should check with the breeder that it is on the “active breeding register”. If it is not you will not be able to register the resulting litter of kittens with the GCCF or other registering body and your female cat will not be accepted at stud by a pedigree stud owner. Advice on breeding and welfare are available from the GCCF and Feline Advisory Bureau (FAB) websites.***

You will also need to consider the potential problem of unplanned matings, ***should your cat inadvertently escape and mate with a stray tom-cat.***

Help may be available from various charities who offer neutering at a discounted rate for those on benefits or low incomes.

The ***process and timing of neutering your cat*** should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon.

Para 5.6. 1<sup>st</sup> bullet-point. We suggest adding tattooing, generally on the back of one ear, as another method of identification which could usefully be added.

**Page 21.** Para 5.7. There are a number of organisations who can help when a cat goes missing. We suggest the following amendment:

You should contact local veterinary surgeons and rescue centres such as the Cat Protection, as well as those in a wider area, as cats can travel for some distance if lost. ***For pedigree cats many breed clubs operate a lost and found, rescue and rehoming services for lost, unwanted and unclaimed pedigree cats of the breed they cater for. Please see GCCF website for contact details of affiliated breed clubs, the GCCF publishes a booklet of cat rescue organisations.*** You can also put up notices locally and ask your neighbours to look in their sheds or garages in case your cat has been accidentally shut in.....

**Page 26 - Annex 2.** We would like to point out that the GCCF website address printed in the list is incorrect. The correct address is: [www.gccfcats.org](http://www.gccfcats.org)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Code of Practice, we look forward to its early publication.

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21<sup>st</sup> December 2008**