

GCCF October Council Meeting 26th October 2011

A lot happened at Council on Wednesday so my report selects and combines topics rather than following the chronological order agenda of the agenda. The intention is to give life to proceedings as well covering the facts.

Thanks.....

This seemed to be the first meeting for some time when delegates did not have to pause and remember those sadly no longer with us. Instead the Chairman, Helen Mariott-Power, was able to welcome delegates and visitors shortly after 1pm and begin on a very positive note commending all to visit the new updated GCCF website. This has been much praised for both its presentational style and ease of use. Helen warmly thanked Mike Barrett and Marcia Owen for their work on this.

....., and congratulations

GCCF has two new Vice-Presidents Elect. After confirmation of the bye-law change which allows for four Vice-presidents, two names were put forward:

Mrs Brenda Wolstenholme and Mr Eric Wickham-Ruffle. They will be formally invited to join Mrs Grace Denny and Mr Gordon Butler in this honorary position, with ratification to be made at the Electoral meeting next June.

Finance

As always this topic was dealt with ahead of much else at the meeting. O'Hara Wood had signed off the accounts for the six months of trading to the end of August 2011. There was a deficit of just over £10k, which is only of concern until it is realised that the figures include the hall hire cost (over £50K) for the Supreme, which will be repaid. Normal activities showed a very positive surplus. The Office Manager explained that income had remained steady over the period, but savings made in expenses were now showing benefit. Reduced hall/room hire costs (from switching the meetings' venue to the Conway Hall), utility savings, in-house printing and a reduced number of DC meetings had all contributed, so that GCCF was making a modest profit.

By the February meeting O'Hara Wood would have completed an examination of the accounts for the full trading year. Each June and October updates would be given to delegates and monthly figures would be presented to the Board and Finance Committee respectively. The schedule of financial checks necessary for a business was now in place.

Because of this later in the meeting Council was able to accept a new policy regarding pricing. Rather than price rises having to increase with inflation automatically which it had been necessary to introduce in 2009 GCCF 'will set its prices at a level that provides income to at least cover its cost with due to recognition to all financial factors in place at the time.' This gives a far greater measure of flexibility suited to the new level of

financial control. It allows prices to rise, fall or stay the same as deemed necessary rather than having inbuilt year on year increases. It feels very good to have reached this point especially in the current economic climate and the office staff, officers and committee members involved with the financial minutiae deserve a great deal of credit.

Administration and Project Updates

The Chairman was able to announce that the IT project had been started. Letters would be sent to clubs shortly asking for the pledged loans to be sent. Little to report other than this at present, but GCCF was on its way to being able to offer services electronically, a long awaited and much needed facility.

During the second office policy recommendation: that the GCCF will actively seek ways of reducing its impact on the environment, particularly by reducing the amount of paper used in providing services through the use of electronic communication, one delegate reminded the office and Board members that decisions should be taken on accepting identity confirmation other than by a signature allowing use on-line in the same as banks and other businesses. The Chairman gave an assurance that this was part of the IT remit and something the Board would be discussing further. There were those very anxious to proceed electronically, but the policy also reiterated that no one should be excluded because they did not want to participate via this means. Clubs were urged to be as flexible.

Bye-law amendments were made that confirmed rules agreed earlier, but which had been omitted from the first publication. There was just one new rule change to bring in the administrative best practice of ensuring the effective date of any amendment to the rules is minuted, and the minutes also make official record of those against an approved proposal and those abstaining from it.

There was a brief update from the Cat Welfare Trust to say that the project would finish at the end of year and the results would be written up over the following months so that eventually a report would be available for the website. However, nothing to new at present from either the GCCF International project or on the World Cat Congress to be hosted in 2013.

I almost forgot to mention the Business Plan, but Steve Crow simply reminded delegates that it was on the website and in their paperwork in full, highlighting what had been achieved and where there was work still to be done. There were no questions from the floor, but approval expressed for Steve's hard work.

The office has taken on a new member of staff, introduced as Annie, whose particular role will be to service meetings, preparing the appropriate paperwork and subsequent records. She's definitely needed and was wished well in her new position.

The one topic that sparked delegate debate on administrative matters was the proposal from the Celtic Longhair and Semi-Longhair Cat Society that all nominees for GCCF

Committees should be on the GCCF website 30 days before the June Electoral Meeting. Several applauded the electoral transparency this would bring, and the opportunity to consult with committee and club colleagues on how votes should be cast. Others were concerned at the set deadline, possible lack of flexibility and problems that could occur if, for example, there were insufficient nominees proposed. It was agreed that it would be a proposal returned for a vote in February after some consideration by the Office and Board had been given to the practicalities of implementation.

Judges and judging featured in many of the afternoon's discussions and debates.

All judge promotions on both the main and supplementary agendas were approved, though it was made clear that Mrs Val Anderson-Drew was being promoted to Full Judge on the Ocicat list only, while Mrs Janet Tonkinson was becoming a Probationer on the Ocicat and the Ocicat Classic lists. Judge withdrawals were accepted without comment.

Mrs Hilary Dean (Secretary, Guild of GCCF Judges and Stewards) presented the first findings of a survey sent to judges and clubs for comment on the writing up of exhibits and classes. This followed the National Cat Club's request for clarification on requirements for Judge Reports. The survey had provoked a good response, with plenty of comment and some very divergent views. Hilary explained that the data would now be looked at by the Committee of Judges' Guild so that some definite recommendations could be brought forward to Council. Delegates were appreciative of the amount of effort and commitment already put into this project and looked forward to further outcome.

However, the proposal that followed this report had a very different reception. The Old Style Siamese Cat Club delegate asked Council to discuss and consider that there was a conflict of interest in the Chairman and Vice-Chairman remaining as serving judges while in office. When it was later intimated that those involved in the Disciplinary Process would be unable to hold objective opinion should officers be referred to them, a distinctive growl of incredulity could be heard. It was clear Council disliked the slur seen to be cast on the reputations past and present officers and also those concerned in monitoring, investigating and adjudicating possible malpractice. This was reflected when a show of hands was taken. Only the proposer was in favour.

During the course of 'Any Other Business' it was noted that with shows finishing earlier there was time for judges to speak to exhibitors once judging had been completed. The Chairman agreed that this was recommended in the Judges' Code of Conduct, and in addition many judges were prepared to email reports direct to exhibitors if a request was made.

Council seemed in general agreement that judge training needed revision to improve the quality of training for candidates, ensure a supply of new judges with those who wished to do so crossing sections, and that new judges had to be employable by Show Management in value for money terms. The Working Group who presented a package of BAC and Show Structure reforms to Council did not expect to please everybody, but there was encouragement that the changes suggested were progress in the right direction.

It was acknowledged that the discussion gave plenty for the Working Group to consider and probable that a set of proposals would not be completed by February. The Vice-Chairman indicated that the changes were complex and would need splitting into units dealing separately with BACs and show structure and this would be the task of the Working Group in the next stage. BAC finance for clubs in the Semi-Longhair and Foreign Sections needed more detailed consideration as did numbers of judges available for Grands after regrouping. Some delegates were understandably concerned with the interests of their own breed, and others commented on particular difficulties, but overall it seemed a very constructive debate.

The revision of the Stewarding Scheme giving jurisdiction for monitoring training to the GCCF Guild of Judges had been completed. Mrs Anne Gregory proposed acceptance for it on behalf of the Working Group, stressing that it ensured stewards would receive effective teaching, monitoring and (for the first time) feedback on their progress. This was approved, with the Board to decide on the date of its implementation. In response to a question it was reiterated that existing candidates would not be disadvantaged in any way. They would start on Part 2 of the new scheme if appropriate, but complete the old if near the end. The Guild Committee could advise if necessary, with the Secretary rather than the office becoming the appropriate contact for information.

Shows and showing

Although both the National Cat Club and the West Country Cat Club had proposals on the agenda deferred from June they were not discussed. They concerned the restructuring of the show award system that had undergone considerable change with the introduction of the Olympian Award and single level entry certificate classes. The Chairman informed Council that she had contacted the Chairmen of the clubs concerned who had agreed that instead of debate and possibly further upheaval now, there should be an open forum in February giving the opportunity for many to come and express views for an hour ahead of the actual Council Meeting. Delegates welcomed this very practical way forward that gave the new system longer to be tested for an approval rating, but allowed the possibility for change in the future if that was the wish of the majority.

In AOB delegates were asked to remind exhibitors that they should not be advertising which cats they would be taking to certain shows via social media sites. Also concern was expressed that shows would lose stall holders if the trend of closing shows ever earlier continued as it would not make business sense for them to attend. There was a reminder that pedigree pets should be judged according to the criteria for the Household Pet Section and not by the SOP of the breed they were as some pedigree judges were inclined to do. It was also suggested that the Board should give some consideration to not allowing newly affiliated clubs to hold separate shows, but encourage 'back to back' arrangements with existing shows.

Breed and Club matters

The Russian and Abyssinian Club of Scotland became a GCCF member and the Khao

Manee Cat Club was granted pre-affiliation status. Two clubs changed their names: the Kensington Kitten and Neuter became simply the Kensington Cat Club and the Northern Siamese CC became the Northern Siamese and Oriental Cat Club. Both have the intent of extending their show intake.

The Australian Mist gained Preliminary Recognition with their Standard, Breeding and Registration Policies approved. Mrs Michele Codd was added to their named judges, and it was confirmed that Mrs Val Anderson was Mrs Val Anderson-Drew, before the list was approved.

The Russian Black and Russian White moved to Provisional Status, as did the Colourpointed and White British Shorthair. As agreed in June Council this status change will be implemented in six months time (26.4.2012)

The Russian Blue Standard of Points revision received approval.

The Variants Policy drawn up by the Genetics Committee to standardise the way in which BACs could apply for breed variants to progress to the show bench, if they so wished, provided some animated debate. Introducing it Steve Crow (GC Chairman) pointed out that it didn't alter the present situation merely clarified it. Individual BACs had the prerogative currently to decide whether or not to progress variants and the policy established the advised route to make any such request to Council. It concerned phenotype only and was not in any way to be related to breeding and registration policies which defined the genetic boundaries of each breed.

During the discussion a suggestion was put forward that all variants should have a special class, though it was pointed that the definition of variants and BAC ambitions for them varied widely. In conclusion there was a vote on whether or not Council endorsed the policy and it was given majority approval.

Council finished at 4.40pm - business done and matters debated in a lively manner, a good afternoon's work.