

MEETING OF OCTOBER COUNCIL 2015

It was one of those occasions when the starting and finishing points were dovetailed neatly. There was concern initially that a quorum wouldn't be reached as there were so few delegates in the room with just ten minutes to go to midday. One conjecture was that the dreadful weather had put people off coming out. The possibility of transport problems and that the early start of this meeting had been forgotten by some were also mentioned.

The final remark in 'any other business' probably got nearer the truth, as the speaker knew of some regular attendees who had decided that they could not get to both Council and the Supreme in the same week. The last decision of the day was not to schedule both so closely together next year.

As it happened a fair few arrived near to the deadline, and with almost ninety delegates taking their seats shortly after twelve the Chairman opened the meeting and another session of Council was underway. Good wishes were sent to the President, Grace Denny, as she was recovering from surgery. A message carrying the hope of a successful and happy day had been received from her. Friends and colleagues who had passed on since June were remembered ahead of all business, with special note of Juanita Sharp, whose early and sudden death had brought sadness to her many friends.

The Codes of Conduct – a hot topic debated

The meeting had started an hour earlier than is usual for an October Council to allow more time for debate, at the request of delegates in June. The controversial issue of whether GCCF should have a Code of Conduct relating to social media had been proposed towards the end of that Council meeting when it was deemed that there was insufficient time for full debate, and that it should return this month, positioned as a key agenda item.

Unfortunately, Michele Codd, who had drafted the Code preferred by the Board, was unable to be present so the Chairman summarised points she had made previously. He stressed that it was suitable to cover GCCF staff, officers, committees and all members of the GCCF community, and had been based on an existing policy of an equine association, drafted with legal guidance (using terminology that gave precise definitions) that spelt out what would be unacceptable. It gave some protection to GCCF as a corporate entity, but also could be used by those who believed they were the victims of cyber bullying.

Several delegates spoke in the subsequent debate. A number made the point that such a code would be unenforceable, particularly because judgment of what was unacceptable was extremely subjective, and also because it would be impossible to prove who had actually made the posting. Another observation was that what appeared on social media was best ignored. Any type of response inflamed a situation that left to itself would be quickly forgotten.

The Chairman of IC, Dr Gillian Bennett spoke in favour of having a code, because it clarified and gave greater definition to what the byelaws termed 'discreditable conduct' and was an existing reason for disciplinary action. Others spoke of setting standards for the GCCF community, making it clear that respect for each other was paramount.

Overall there seemed more delegates who were dismissive of the idea of a code of conduct applicable to all, and this was reflected in the outcome of the vote. 37 proved to be in favour and 54 against.

An alternative code, based on the Kennel Club's, had been proposed by the Southern and South Western Birman Cat Club. This set out the expectation of respect for others from social media users, but stressed it was not GCCF's responsibility to become involved in disputes, instead directing those with grievances to seek legal advice. This found even less favour amongst delegates. Only 19 voted for, with 74 against. Presumably some of those wanting a code that had the possibility of sanctions preferred no code at all to one that merely requested fair play.

BREED & CLUB MATTERS

Revisions to registration policies and SOPs

There was approval today for four revised registration policies and four amended standards of points. The Russian BAC had taken steps to avoid the LH gene being spread in the population. Measures taken did not find favour with all present (2 against) but the Balinese, Oriental and Somali policy revisions were approved unanimously.

There were no queries about the SOP changes for the Balinese, Selkirk Rex, Tonkinese and Turkish cats. However, one comment from a delegate, who is also a well known judge of the breed, did comment that it was time the Turkish standard included reference to chins, and this will be referred to the BAC who can consider further revision in due course.

One breed promotion and recognition for two new breeds

Tonkinese with Burmese Colour restriction now have championship status and any show not yet closed may offer a breed class for them. All shows will have to include such classes by 21.2.16. Cinnamon and Fawn Point Balinese, with the colours also allowed for in Tortie, Tabby and Tortie/Tabby Points, may now be shown in the existing Balinese breed class with immediate effect in shows not closed.

Two new breeds were introduced. The Chartreux, the blue cat of France, (a profile is already on the GCCF website) and the Toyger, a mackerel tabby patterned breed derived from Bengals and domestic cats. A delegate representing a Bengal breed club queried whether breeds based on the Bengal were acceptable, because of undertakings given at the time of Bengal recognition. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman remarked that the existing GCCF breeding policy, approved by Council, did not permit new breeds based on outcrossing to wild cats, and that although Bengals were derived from another feline species originally, it had been substantiated that no new outcrossing had been used to develop the Toyger.

Club affairs

The Tabby Cat Club had been newly reconstituted and dispensation was granted for it continuing to have delegate representation. Also a new club, the Australian Mist Cat Association, had full membership approved. Council was informed that two clubs whose names currently contained "Ocicat Classic" wished to change this to "Aztec" in line with the name change approved for the breed in June Council. This was accepted as common sense.

The Chairman sought opinion on a proposal made by the Finance Committee that there should be a penalty applied to clubs who made late returns, to encourage paperwork by 1 May, as required by the byelaws, and go some way to covering the administrative costs involved in chasing up those who delayed. Delegate opinion seemed in favour of a higher penalty than the £10 suggested by FC, but some allowance of extenuating circumstances. It will now be for the Board to discuss the matter further and bring forward a proposal to February Council.

Changes that will affect all

There were two general matters relating to registration. It was agreed that the Experimental Register had outlived its usefulness, and it need not feature on the new computer system. New breeds, like the Chartreux and the Toyger, would require a registration policy that would be implemented from the outset. It would be their show status that would depend on the level of recognition they had reached. New colours and patterns of existing breeds would be registered according to the direction given by the extant policy for the breed, with show status dependent on whether they were entering an existing class or a new one had been requested by the BAC. A number of rule changes will be involved in removing the EXP, and as the principle had been approved these will be posted on the GCCF website once the wording is approved by the Board.

Although there was a strongly expressed objection it was also agreed that minor changes to registration policies could also be posted on the website, with a period allowed for objection, in much the same way as judge appointments. There would then be notification at the next Council meeting in order that the change was minuted so a record would be kept. It was envisaged that the type of changes covered would be any corrections necessary, clarification of wording and/or changes made to comply with policies approved by Council.

One delegate remarked that this method of informing, allowing objection and recording, could be used for all non-material changes that were currently brought to Council. There could well be a proposal for this purpose on the next agenda.

RULES, BYELAWS AND A NEW APPEALS COMMITTEE

There were several rule changes. Note the first particularly as this will change the requirement for certificates of entirety. It is effective immediately, but will not be applied retrospectively

This was a proposal from the Veterinary Advisory Committee, and was perhaps the most contentious as some breeders do not like the use of microchips. It was suggested that it should be a recommendation rather than a rule, but, perhaps because recognised that vets are increasingly requiring that definitive confirmation of identity is a necessity for valid test record, it was approved by a substantial majority (12 against, 3 abstentions). Therefore from today all certificates of entirety will be required to carry the detail of a microchip number or that of an alphanumeric tattoo.

Male cats were also the subject of discussion for consideration of whether the use of an hormonal implant for contraception was acceptable for those coming to the show bench. Although there was some concern expressed that these altered behaviour and appearance it was considered acceptable that breeders opting to use them for studs should not be penalised, as this was frequently done for the benefit of the cat concerned. Most delegates supported this.

An addition to an existing rule clarified that females should not be shown if it was suspected they could be pregnant. This was intended as a deterrent of poor practice, but it was pointed out that it could easily be checked and proven if necessary by comparing a queen's show record with the date of birth on a litter registration application.

Exhibitors may now ask that their addresses are not published in show catalogues, and show managers will be obliged to accede to such requests. However, details of all addresses will still be required in show returns. It was queried whether there was now no necessity for any addresses to be published, though some delegates felt an exhibitor should always have an option. The decision was that the rule as proposed would be considered on this occasion, and if clubs wished for further change they could propose it as a new change, rather than as an amendment.

Two other show rule changes were for the purpose of consistency. It was clarified that exhibits could be withdrawn up to a published extension entry date, and that overseas judges had equality of eligibility with GCCF judges for the purpose of judging title classes.

To assist the Board and the Genetics Committee in their discussions on requested registration policy amendments BACs must now send a rationale to explain the purpose of such changes. As changes now include additions to testing/screening for a range of health factors it has become essential to understand why what is wanted is required to be able to assess whether it is achievable by the method proposed.

These changes were approved, but the removal of the rule about smoking and handling cats was withdrawn. It was thought no longer to serve a purpose as smoking in public places is banned, but there was no certainty this covered e-cigarettes and thought it was best left in place just in case it should be required in future.

Byelaw revisions

The first byelaw change permitted the election of the Appeals Committee to take place at this October Council meeting, and subsequent ones. There had not been sufficient applicants to appoint to AC in June, and fortunately there were six to take the existing places today, once the bylaw change was approved.

The other change was a minor wording amendment to clarify that the maximum for a first fixed penalty charge was £100. It was confirmed that although this could double or triple if the serious issues it was used for were repeated, it never had been, since IC could refer any case to DC, and would certainly do so if the welfare of cats was involved.

The Appeals Committee

Maria Chapman-Ber, Pat Cherry, Cynthia Cullin, Carol Pike, Elisabeth Stark and Betty Shingleton are now members of the Appeals Committee. There are no reserves, but as the committee is quorate with three, this should not be a problem. The Chairman asked that they work out amongst themselves who should stay for one, two and three years initially, though there could be an electoral process in February if they couldn't decide this.

He also reminded Council that the AC had a dual remit. It could hear cases referred on from the Disciplinary Committee, as would be expected from the name, but it could also be used for arbitration in club/BAC/individual disputes when its decision was binding. There was the possibility that this function could be used more widely in future.

SHOW BUSINESS

News of a survey

The Chairman of the Show Structure Review reported that the survey designed to obtain input from all those interested would be published shortly. It would be sent to those whose email addresses were held on record by GCCF, and would also be posted on the GCCF website, and go to Facebook pages. Delegates were urged to spread news of it and encourage participation.

It was short, just five simple questions, with an invitation for additional ideas. The running period would be until 7 December and it was hoped that collation would be completed in time so that the group could meet early in the new year and make proposals for February Council.

Judge Appointments

Most judge appointments following June Council had been made after four weeks of website publication. The detail of these was recorded for delegates as information. There were just three to confirm at the meeting, which were approved. It's a system that seems to be liked and that has worked smoothly so far.

Revisions to the Judge Appointment Scheme

The new forms for Judge Appointment Scheme Tutorials and Assessments were withdrawn. The Vice-Chairman (Chair of the BAC Review Group) commented that they were necessary as they would give far more information on candidates to BACs, but some corrections needed to be made in advance of their use. There was some discussion on the revised JAS Philosophy & Principles and Rules of Procedure with delegates querying the practicality of removing some sections. It was concluded that these were worthwhile observations that needed further consideration by the BACRG. Mr Hansson therefore invited further comment ahead of any changes being finalised.

New certificate designs

Mrs Fisher reported that feedback on the new designs for show certificates had shown approval for use of the new GCCF logo and change of style, but that the majority of exhibitors wanted the use of gold and silver card continued rather than a change to white. She was therefore researching cost and sources of this type of card and had produced designs suitable for it that would be available to view as soon as possible. The one query was if the space for names and titles would be bigger, and Rosemary gave assurance that she was well aware from personal experience of the need for this.

News of the Supreme Show

The most disappointing news of the day was given by the Chairman on behalf of the Supreme Show Manager (who was involved in show preparation, and therefore not present).

The number of cats entered was 120 down on that for the previous year and therefore it could not be expected that the show could break even. A good gate (and Royal Canin had been actively involved in promotion) and catalogue sales could help, but loss was anticipated.

The Chairman promised that figures would be reported to Council in February, and that no commitments for 2016 would be entered into until there had been an opportunity to discuss whether the Supreme could continue in its present form.

REPORTS

Chair's opening summary

The Chairman's introductory remarks were brief this time, as there were just a few updates to give that weren't going to be covered elsewhere on the agenda. He informed delegates that the Canine & Feline Sector Group had met twice since June, and although much of the business was concerned with dogs they were reviewing the welfare codes that, once finalised, would go to DEFRA so that updates could be made.

The Breeding and Sale of Cats Working Group (of C&FSG) had gathered information that when collated would also head DEFRA's way in the form of recommendations. Steve said he considered his participation here was vital so that he could continue to stress the difference between the unregulated production of moggies, and the hobby of responsible pedigree breeding. As the draft bill to regulate cat breeding had not been dropped by its proposer, Lord Black, though it had little chance of a hearing, the link to it would remain on the website.

News had come in very recently that GCCFI were prepared to accept the Board's offer of a less extensive service with different terms at a lower cost. They would be signing a letter of intent to do business and putting this to their Council in November. If approved then a contract would be signed.

The business partnerships

A little later in the meeting the Chair gave partnership news. There was confirmation that GCCF was benefiting from its business links with both Agria and Royal Canin. The commission earned from policy conversions (when new owners take a full insurance policy) had already reached almost £25,000 this year, showing just how valuable this partnership was. It was the prime factor in GCCF being able to hold its prices for services, so indirectly all breeders benefitted.

About 100 breeders had opted out of the transfer incentive scheme sponsored by Royal Canin, but phone calls received by the Office indicated it was proving popular with owners. This was confirmed by the first growth in transfer activation for over a year. The months since June showed an average upturn of 6%, and a recent meeting with RC had indicated that the company was pleased with the voucher redemption rate. It would be interesting to see if similar results could be given in February.

Website update

Mrs Fisher reported that the new website had had some early problems, but these were now resolved, and its development was continuing. She was particularly pleased with the breed section, but reminded club and BAC representative to be in touch if amendments were needed.

The next stage of the project would take in improvements of the Breeder Scheme section of the site to enable breeders to upload and remove their kitten availability details and advertise stud services.

New IT development

Project Phoenix was not yet complete, but Mrs Rainbow-Ockwell was pleased to be able to report that as planned the testing had reached a point that indicated the system was sufficiently robust to allow staff training to commence in November. There had been some setbacks, as the initial review of the iSeries had not shown all of its functions, and those that had been uncovered subsequently were having to be factored in, but the contract with DTC meant that there would be no extra charge for this. Time was the main concern for the volunteers involved rather than costs. In response to a query Sally made the point that although nothing could be definite there was nothing at present that indicated to her that the project would much exceed the cost of its planned budget targets.

Financial news

Last, but certainly not least, the Office Manager's report on the current financial situation was very upbeat. With the income from Agria, some growth in most areas of core business, and cost savings in addition, the end of year surplus was looking promising.

The 2014 accounts had been sent to Company House to meet the 30 September deadline in accordance with the wishes of June Council, and a re-presentation of these with further written commentary was presented to delegates. This format, with additional income detail and remuneration notes, would be used the next year by O'Hara Wood, and should provide the clarity that delegates had found lacking. There were some further questions answered on the day by Mark Goadby, whose careful stewardship and detailed knowledge of the finances is indeed an invaluable asset to GCCF.

That happy thought brings this report to a conclusion.

Jen Lacey 22 October 2015,