

THE GENERAL MEETING OF GCCF COUNCIL, FEBRUARY 2017

It seems no time since I reported on the last Council meeting, but another four months has passed. There have been the good times, the 40th Supreme, for instance, as well as successful club shows around the country, and a fair amount of hard work, particularly in the GCCF Office where the new computer system is now part of everyday life, but at the beginning of each Council it's always a time of sadness as we remember those who have touched our lives as acquaintances, colleagues and/or close friends.

The most recent loss was John Robinson, a GCCF Director and renowned show manager, and we thought of judges Chris Bamford, Jean Murchison and Louvane Stevenson as well as those who worked to make shows run and be fun, or had spent many years committed to their breed. There were ten in all, and we stood and remembered them in the moment of silence that is now traditional for the beginning of any Council meeting.

I think I would term this meeting as 'the quiet one'. That's not only because less than 80 delegates managed to attend, and there were no hot topics, one or two sparky moments, but no contentious issues, or tempers flared; it was rather that much of the meeting was given to reports, most giving new information and some of it quite detailed. Delegates were in listening mode, asking questions and occasionally giving feedback.

REPORTS

Financial report

I'm going to break with my usual practice this time and begin with finance. That's because some news that will be of immediate interest lies there. It was announced that the promise to repay the club loans that fall due on 17 April would be honoured. Club Chairmen and Treasurers will receive a letter very shortly to explain the process and ask for any necessary bank details. The financial reserves are there to make immediate repayments to all on request. It's as simple as that. Other options will be outlined, such as the opportunity to donate, but it's thought that most clubs will want repayment and that's what will happen.

Perhaps that's as is to be expected, but I doubt if I was the only delegate to be in Council some six years or more ago, when the idea of renewing the IT system was put forward, who was prepared to ask my club to consider a loan, but could not feel absolutely certain it would be repaid in time, if at all. We were in another place then, emerging from the grip of recession to an uncertain future. It's been good to be on the Board through a time when there has been some luck and good management calls to make the most of this, to put us today's position when Mark Goadby, Office Manager, could report that from an overall look at the end of year figures turnover had increased to around £400,000 per year, about an 8% increase on 2015, and the operational profit on this had risen to well above the 10% level, towards 15%, in fact.

There weren't any actual accounts provided, although in response to a request this will be considered at this time next year, as the end of year figures were now subject to formal examination. However, Mark had provided the graphs to indicate that there had been continued growth in core business in many areas.

Perhaps it was a little disappointing that prefix registrations had held more or less steady, but the growth in non-prefix registrations and imports onto the GCCF register were at record levels, and the number of transfers made had also increased. Prefix applications were better than in 2015 too, another indicator of good future prospects.

So GCCF has spent a considerable amount of money on IT, but is in a position to repay its loans, maintain some financial reserves and plan future projects for further improvement of services, a good place to be. Delegates were happy at this point to approve in principle (the actual rule has to be written) the waiving of any fees if a GCCF rule, or breed registration policy, for a mandatory DNA or any other health check (such as BAER testing for deafness) required a status change, that is a move between non-active, and/or genetic record to give the cat active breeding status. As the Chairman commented, when unanimous support was given, it's good to be able to encourage testing positively.

Chairman's Address

Mark's upbeat financial news was really welcome after Chairman, Steve Crow, reported that our hobby could possibly face some sea changes ahead. The government has been consulting for some time about the possibility of amending the 2006 Animal Welfare Act, including the licensing of those breeding animals for sale in their own homes. It was spelt out in answer to a parliamentary question just weeks ago that this would include pedigree breeders as well as those allowing pet cats to have litters. The responsibility for licensing would most likely lie with the local authority who would almost certainly pass on any costs incurred to those who applied for licences.

That is the extent of the information to date. How closely any cat licensing would follow the model for dogs, which is dependent upon the number of females owned and litters bred, just isn't known. Much will depend on the terms of the legislation and the procedure that puts it into operation and that won't be known until plans to be called 'Next Steps' are published at some unspecified time in the future. All that GCCF could do was ensure readiness to be involved in future discussions and aim to minimise any impact.

Delegates discussed this news with consideration to practices in the dog world, and the knowledge that those who aimed to maximise profit with little regard to health and welfare would do their best to stay well below any licensing radar. There were also comments on the possible interest of the Inland Revenue in 'profits'. It was recognised that ours wasn't a money spinning hobby, but that the message that had to go out to breeders was to keep careful records to be able to prove this in case of any HMRI questioning.

Business Plan

Sally explained this was a set of eleven goals for 2017-21, projected according to the current economic landscape, though this naturally carried many future unknowns. Therefore it was accompanied by a revised risk assessment. The aims were to be developed into projects to be worked on, and it was intended that each Board member should take responsibility in one or more. Therefore those who wished to stand for the Board in June this year would need to state their interests with reference to the goals in their nomination statement.

In brief these were:

- International expansion. The work for GCCFI was underway, could work be undertaken for other small registries?
- HHP registration. A target had been set and incentives had to be offered, especially to junior cat owners
- Expansion of show numbers
- A staff member dedicated to marketing - after the new staff appointment in the Office Heather McIntyre would be the member of the staff team championing this
- Getting GCCF high on search engine results for kitten sales and pedigree cat information.
- Getting all GCCF services on-line by the end of this year
- Developing revenue from other sources other than core business with new business relationships forged alongside those existing with Agria and Royal Canin
- Pedigree registration and transfers and the Breeder Scheme offering better service to breeders
- Training judges more efficiently.
- Using customer surveys, and reporting and using the information gained effectively
- Broadening services to young people

Data protection was mentioned in addition, as the company would be required by law to be compliant with new regulations by 2018.

There was a time line to indicate when during the five years it was hoped these goals would be achieved and budget planning had been based around them. There were some queries from the floor, questioning whether targets set were realistic and clarification of detail, but overall the plan seemed to be understood and accepted, and Sally was thanked for her work.

Project Phoenix.

Mrs Rainbow-Ockwell then moved on to presenting the figures for Project Phoenix, explaining the differences between what had been forecast and the actual outcome. There two areas of significance: the company hired at not completed the programming per its contract (as explained at a previous Council) and GCCF had had to employ an independent programmer. Because of the delays caused by the project being more complex than initially projected by DTC completion was not to schedule and the staff savings expected had not yet been made. However, there was indication now that this was coming into play, and staff numbers were now reduced.

In conclusion it was true to say that at least £50,000 had been saved due to system change, compared with maintaining the old system and the number staff needed to operate the procedures based on its level of functionality. Plus GCCF now had a system that was not at significant risk of failure, and was capable of dealing with the new services it was hoped to add in the future.

A vote of thanks was proposed by Sally for the Office staff, Mark and Heather, and programmer Leon, all of whom had committed extra time on many occasions to getting the new system to deal with the many complexities of GCCF's unique requirements. The Chairman followed this with his proposal of thanks to Sally and to Ian Macro who had contributed their professional expertise and time to ensuring the project was delivered.

Future IT development

Sally explained there would be ongoing development behind the scenes to give greater office efficiency. What this using the online services would see was the GCCFI link, providing the first international registration service, and then the Breeder Scheme needed to be integrated into the system to give members the opportunity to do their own updating and renewals. It was also the intention to make the whole website much more user friendly for all portable devices, so smart phone users would definitely benefit.

Then, it was the intention to improve services for show managers and clubs. A 'show services' package would be offered so that online entries could be taken in the same way as for the Supreme. It was planned to make Phoenix display judge information and automatically update lists and eligibility for title classes. Eventually clubs would be able to make online returns and update their information if changes occurred during the year.

Breeders would have the one click transfer facility offered again, be able to enter mating details, and should benefit from results of surveys. Sally concluded that other ideas would be welcome, and would be provided if the demand was there and it was possible to install them with not too much cost and/or difficulty.

In response to a complaint about system failure experienced by one delegate she said she could only reiterate her advice of the previous meeting and all should be aware of it. If a problem is experienced, and no result is obtained from a first contact with the Office, then don't wait for something to happen, but get in touch with someone else. Mark could usually be reached, or she was quite happy to be contacted personally. If they could not supply an answer immediately they would know who to go to deal with the problem, and a time frame for a solution should be given. One addition to the system would be a 'help desk' for users to report problems and there would always be a response made.

Two other little snippets of information followed. A new GCCF publication would be available in early March from the Office and shows: The 'Einstein Guide to GEMS' would tell everything you ever wanted to know about the system's lettering and numbering. Also, in response to a query it was explained that because GCCF had so many different variants, each was coded according to its individual phenotype with a 'v' added to show it was a variant in respect of that breed.

Partnership reports

The Chairman reported on a recent informative meeting with Agria at which the transition to a new Chair and Vice-Chair were discussed. It was now five years since the contract between the insurance company and GCCF was signed, and the initial period was completed, but both parties were content for it to roll on. He stressed how beneficial this was to GCCF in terms of the amount earned (£5,000 per month). Therefore it seemed a matter of common sense for breeders to give out the free kitten cover notes. It was only Agria and Netplan who issued these, and from data available to the insurers it seemed that 50% of breeders used neither company.

Otherwise insurance was a personal matter, and he could understand those who preferred another company, or put money aside, but he hoped Agria would be given consideration, and like

for like would be looked at when comparisons were made. The company would be recommended by GCCF to consider its promotion of itself to breeders, and to pet owners, who from some recent cases did not seem so well served.

There were no problems at all in the relationship with Royal Canin. GCCF transfer numbers continued to grow and RC was having the best response it had ever had to any of its campaigns. They would be sponsoring the Supreme once again.

News was given of the 'Checklist For Kitten Buyers', produced by the Cat Group that had reached its final draft. It was intended that all organisations should use it, and GCCF would feature it prominently on the website. It was one of the best efforts yet to educate the kitten buying public. It was also hoped to enter discussions again with ICC to provide online education modules for breeders, possibly offered to those in the Breeder Scheme initially.

The Chairman concluded by mentioning the government's plans re animal welfare again briefly. He believed that GCCF had to designate itself as a forward-thinking self-regulating registry. Mandatory microchipping for cats was one issue much discussed, and he thought it might be time to look again at GCCF's position on this, extending its use by rule rather than being advisory. There was a discussion to be had.

BREEDER, EXHIBITOR & CLUB NOTES

Breed News

The Australian Mist has championship status. It's something breeders have worked hard for, so congratulations are in order.

British Longhair breeders are just at the beginning of this journey, as the BLH now has name recognition, meaning cats can be registered and put on exhibition. There were some questions from BSH delegates on this move, particularly with reference to the British SH registration policy, but it was explained that variants could legitimately be progressed if the criteria given in the rules were met, and there were several precedents for this.

(In line with FIFe, Council approved the use of GEMS code BSH and BLH for British Shorthair and Longhair, but implementation will be after the BSGC have chance to discuss this at their BAC meeting early next month.)

For Balinese breeders there is a registration policy change that should assist with genetic diversity for the breeder, adding Orientals to permitted outcrosses. Oriental Shorthairs too have registration policy updates with particular reference to Oriental Longhairs and Longhair Variants, and white cats of Oriental type. If further information the new policies should be on the GCCF website very soon.

There are some very minor amendments to the British SH and Siamese SOPs. Rosemary Fisher also gave a brief explanation of the project to standardise the format of SOPs, and make them usable with illustrations on portable devices, Kindle, tablets, smart phones etc. That way they would be of particular use to judges, especially those who were novices.

One rule change of note was for all breeders. The Southern British SH CC had proposed that the range of words that could be repeated in names was extended to include the fifteen most common English propositions. These join the definite and indefinite articles (the, a, an) appropriate breed colour/pattern/coat description word, and recognized human titles as being able to be used more than once, so for example, you could have 'Over the Moon' and 'Glad All Over' as names following a prefix, without having to use hyphens. More leeway to get creative!

Club News

There are three new clubs. The Aztec Cat Club and Northern British SH and LH Cat Club both now have Full GCCF Membership and the Toyger Cat Club is a provisional member.

And BACs

The Judge Appointment Scheme had been amended to include reference to all recent rules and Byelaws pertaining to the appointment of judges. It had also been scrutinised by several pairs of eyes to remove several typographical errors that had crept as it had been amended over the years. The plan was now to replace what existed on the website so that all BACs could reference a clean updated version.

All new judge appointments were agreed.

SHOW MATTERS

The Supreme Show 2016-17

The accounts had just been finalised and the news was that in 2016 the Supreme Show had a deficit of precisely £15,484.27. The gate had increased quite considerably, with advance ticket sales strong, but exhibit numbers had remained static. There was some disappointment at this, but there also seemed acceptance by delegates that if there was to be an event that promoted pedigree cats and the GCCF to the public in a prestigious venue then this now came with a price tag.

The Chairman took some comment from the floor on why exhibiting at the Supreme there was no longer as popular as it once was. Some were of the opinion that a date later in the year should be secured if possible as a greater number of cats would be in coat. The lack of atmosphere was also mentioned, as was hall layout, with the need to avoid large empty spaces, but it was also noted that what some disliked pleased others. It was thought that requiring qualification for breed class entrants had made no significant difference and wouldn't be repeated.

John Hansson, Vice-Chairman then went on to outline the progress that had been made for this year's Supreme. He was event organiser, with Lynda Ashmore as Show Manager. Sally Tokens would look after the pedigree section, Lesley Swzed do the same for pets, and managers had been secured for the rings. The halls would be different, but the much disliked bus journey would be avoided for all but late comers, as an adjoining hall had been reserved for no extra cost, so parking would be on site, under cover.

It was intended that letters would be sent to judges in March, but at present discussions on the class structure were still ongoing. There had been some suggestions that there should be greater competition, certificates came too easily, but others wanted more splits. Negotiations were also underway with an off-site hotel, as it hoped to improve on the quality of what was provided and reduce costs. Details would be announced once finalised.

Once again clubs would be given space at no cost to provide a 'Meet the Breeds' area that always proved popular with the public, and would also be invited to sponsor rosettes and advertise. Ticket pricing was being planned for gate entry, with discounts available for families to provide an incentive to those attending an event in an adjoining hall. So planning was well underway and it was hoped new initiatives would encourage exhibitors to enter.

Show Structure Review

Catherine Kaye, Chairman, gave a quick update on the work of the Show Structure Review Group. There had been one meeting since Council in October and, considering feedback from delegates, coupled with the knowledge that GCCF was losing judges at a rate four or five times faster than new ones were created, this had resulted in a decision to have a joint meeting with the BAC Review Group. The need to revise judge training procedure seemed inextricably link with structure reorganization, which would take place at the end of March. John Hansson was working hard on collating judge class eligibility data and it was hoped to put forward some proposals at the next Council meeting.

Show Rules

There were two updates on show rules, revising procedure for what had already been agreed.

From June those being awarded an overall Best In Show would get an additional certificate for the class that was being worked towards. That had been decided, but it was considered that this was best sent out from the GCCF Office as it was impossible for Show Managers to know in advance what type of certificate would be required. So once the show team had checked the results it would be signed and posted out, and the cat's show record would be updated at the same time.

It was confirmed that kittens would not get a certificate, though club's were welcome to make suggestions if it was thought recognition of the achievement should be made. Also, that any cat achieving BIS at both shows taking place in one venue would get a certificate for each, and that the household pet achievements would be the same as for the pedigree section.

The other update affected HHPs directly. From June 2017 what had been agreed in Council in June 2014 would be put into practice. It had to wait until the computer system could make the necessary records. Now that HHPs could be registered they would need to be if titles were to be claimed. Pedigree pets would not need to be re-registered if they already had their pedigree registration number, but would have to make an HHP registration if they were not. It was confirmed that schedule information would need updating, and that if any actual rule changes were needed they would be brought to Council in June.

AND FINALLY

There was very little time left at the end of the afternoon for any general discussion to take place, but conference calls, with particular reference to BACs, was touched upon. It was thought that if secret voting was the issue holding this back, there were now methods of conducting this online. Sally and Mark offered to investigate the possibilities and see if they could be readily available for all BACs, and it was agreed that this should be done.

However, opinion was that until a way forward was found the BAC constitution did not make allowance for virtual meetings, although acknowledged that some small BACs had difficulty getting a sufficient number of people together for an actual occasion.

The meeting finished at 5.10pm. I'm sure you can appreciate that a lot of ground was covered.

Jen Lacey 16.2.2017