

Advisory Council on Companion Animal Welfare

Minutes of Meeting

Date: 26th May 2022

Venue: Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise, Co Laois

Meeting Time: 14.00 – 17.00

Attendee's:

Seán O'Laoide (Chair), Eoin Ryan (DAFM), Sean Murray (DAFM), Catherine Lawler (DAFM), Aiden Maguire (DAFM), Conor Dowling (ISPCA), Jim Stephens (IKC), Karla Dunne (Dogs Trust), Rory Breathnach (UCD), Siobhan Mullen (UCD), Una O'Toole (Irish Blue Cross), Sarah Lynch (Dogs Trust), Clare Meade (Cat Hospital), Alan Rossiter (Veterinary Ireland).

1. Minutes and Action points from previous meeting

Minutes of previous meeting were agreed.

A discussion to place in relation to responsible pet ownership initiatives

- IKC have rewritten "Buying a Puppy" booklet which will be circulated at the Festival of Dogs show on 28th & 29th May 2022. Feedback will be taken from the show and passed on to ACCAW members. Once DAFM receive the booklet from IKC they will circulate to ACCAW members.
- Cat Hospital – Pet Ownership Responsibilities is a document they used practice for a number of years. Educating the public on the basic responsibilities has difference on how the public engage with their services.
- UCD – Currently don't have an SOP on responsible pet ownership. UCD do however, teach the students about responsible pet ownership.
- DAFM – ACCAW will make recommendations to the Minister. DAFM are also engaged with social scientists regarding a pet ownership survey/study they are carrying out with the public. This study is more welfare rather than legislation. The Animal Welfare Grant application has been updated this year to reflect this. DAFM are in the final stages of a 3-part study with UCD in relation to the dog population in Ireland and the charities.
- The Chair was involved with the tidy towns committee and gave a presentation about responsible pet ownership. This group could look at tidy town committees and local authorities for spreading the message to the public. Once DAFM receive the presentation from the Chair they will circulate to ACCAW members.
- ISPCA – Most of their pet ownership advice is online. The have recently produced leaflets on microchipping and care sheets for reptiles.
- Dogs Trust – Consideration needs to make when rolling out an national pet ownership campaign as all pets are different. Will this be a generic or different proposal regarding different breeds, also how will it be measured?

The Chair acknowledged this as it's difficult to gauge the numbers reading the leaflets/handouts compared to social media which is easier to gauge. UCD suggested that we make efforts not to replicate what the charities are engaged in. IKC suggested bringing this into the school curriculum based around animal welfare. Through education and not just legislation like many European countries is doing at the moment. Agriware is another outlet to educate and bring young people onboard which can also include the food chain.

On Ukrainian pets, DAFM informed the group that approx. 1,000 Ukrainian pets and 780 owners have come into Ireland with various pets through the airport which are examined by DAFM vets on arrival. They are assigned to home quarantined, microchipped if required, registered and health checks carried out.

DAFM confirmed they are only accepting accompanied pets with Ukrainian families and not from a commercial perspective.

2. Brachycephalics

The VICAS Motion on Brachycephalic Dogs 2022 was circulated to ACCAW members. Veterinary Ireland advises that members of the public do not purchase brachycephalic dogs. To address the welfare concerns of brachycephalic dogs Veterinary Ireland calls on the Minister to introduce legislation on the 4 points raised in this motion.

Veterinary Ireland spoke on the VICAS motion, ear cropping/mutilation and fertility clinics.

- Ear Cropping – This is illegal along with any cosmetic procedure for a vet or non-vet to carry out. It is also illegal to show an animal in relation to this.
- ISPCA stated that an authorised officer can enforce this, but the problem is proving who carried out the act. Need to look at the legislation on this for example the ban of importation or the sale of them. ISPCA would like a phasing out over a period of time and eventually illegal to own them.
- VI suggested a S.I. exclusively for this.
- DAFM are looking at additional legislation to support this and the views of this group to make recommendations to the Minister.
- With regards to fertility clinics VI informed the group they are becoming prevalent for certain breeds which the ISPCA and DSPCA are aware of. The majority of these are in the Dublin area so will fall under the remit of the DSPCA. There are issues regarding animal welfare legislation, veterinary practice act and revenue.
- Brachycephalic Handout – VI informed the group that this is an ongoing and worldwide issue with breathing issues a recurring problem. VI suggested either banning certain breeds or only breeding with those that don't have severe abnormalities. VI read out the document for those attending online.

Round the table discussion followed.

- The Chair queried as to whether there is an international agreed approach to this assessment.
- VI responded that there isn't at the moment but it's being worked on. Further down the line VI would like to see these assessments done in a few centres around the country by

specialised people. Done in a way that's objective rather than subjective, which is repeatable but final.

- The Cat Hospital added many cats have health issues also and because of this the Cat Club don't register them or allow them to partake in cat shows and was wondering if the IKC do the same. The IKC informed that they have had meetings with the VICAS group and the matter is still on the agenda.
- UCD circulated the UK brachycephalic working group document. The UCD approach is focusing on innate health. The main focus is on education rather than legislation. Siobhan met the Chairman of Compasses Dan O'Neill, a vet practice-based population screening programme. Dan considers that the majority of brachycephalic are not kennel club registered. IKC confirmed this within Ireland.
- The Chair suggested social media can play a large part in an information campaign as influencer or advertisers they can start a trend very fast.
- ISPCA supports the VICAS document but added that we are far removed from properly regulating any group dog breeding in Ireland before we can get to the specifics. To get the public onboard it needs education and legislation. IKC suggests banning advertisers from using these animals for their products.
- VI added that VICAS are going to pursue this stance adding there are some great breeders out there trying to address the problem who need support. If the public stop buying these breeds breeders stop breeding them. It could also be followed up by consumer legislation.
- ISPCA suggested DRCD look at registrations of commercial dog breeders and make it a condition on certain breeds.
- Dogs Trust were of the opinion that having traceability, centralising, and validating the data of pet/companion animals in Ireland. Traceability will lead to enforcement.
- DAFM believes the UK approach is a good one.

Action: UCD agreed to Chair the ACCAW Brachycephalic Subgroup with Veterinary Ireland, ISPCA, Dogs Trust, IKC and DAFM to make up the group.

3. Date of next meeting

September/October with the Brachycephalic Subgroup to meet in advance to report back to ACCAW. Both TBC.