

Police Dog Training Standard v1



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1 Introduction

This document outlines the appropriate methods of training for police dogs in a formalised setting, informal setting and whilst being deployed, as set out by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). The standard is directed to all dog handlers, trainers, kennel staff and personnel involved with (and managers responsible for) the training of Police dogs.

It applies to all police dogs undergoing, initial training, continuation training, husbandry training, training in the operational arena, and any other training, in a formal and informal context and applies whether the handler is on or off duty.

It brings together information from scientific literature and government guidelines, including the Practitioner's Guide to Working Dog Welfare, **DEFRA Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs**, and **NPSA guidance notes**, as well as consultation with the RSPCA.

All forces should have individual policies, procedures, and risk assessments in relation to the training of their police dogs. This standard aims to assist instructors in their decision-making process during training and behaviour modification.

The National Decision Model (NDM) will be utilised at all times when training options need considering.

This document will be read in conjunction with **NPSA Guidance notes** on training and welfare.

Essential Background knowledge:

- **An Introduction to Animal Learning for Working Dog Users**
- **An Introduction to Marker Training**

2 Training

Training is regarded as whenever a police dog is given a comment, either verbal (sit, down, wait) or physical (pulling on lead) and an outcome is desired or expected.

All staff must be trained, and competent in ensuring that there is good provision for canine welfare and safe handling. All staff will have a documented Continuous Professional Development portfolio to ensure they are adequately trained to the requirements of their role, or within the process of being so trained.

Correct preparation of the training environment can limit the number of mistakes made, but it is unrealistic to expect a dog to perform perfectly every time. Mistakes should be anticipated and should be seen as an opportunity to improve learning and the overall competence of the dog in any given exercise. All persons involved in the training and care of police dogs should adopt this approach. Doing so enables the use of positive reinforcement.

Successful dog training revolves around repetition. The more the dog can predict the consequences of its behaviour, the more reliable the behaviour will be. All persons involved in the training and care of police dogs have a responsibility to limit any confusion a dog may have within the training process.

3 Policing Standards

The **Code of Ethics** is at the core of every decision made and is just as important when making decisions around the training of police dogs. The Code of Ethics defines the Policing Principles and Standards of Professional Behaviour expected of Police officers and staff at all times.

4 Utilising the NDM

All officers and staff must utilise the **NDM** to articulate and justify their decision before starting any dog training plan.

4.1 Information Gathering

Officers should consider different information around animal behaviour when making decisions on dog training. These include:

- animal behaviour changes what they do based on the outcomes of doing it
- behaviour is a selected consequence
- behaviours that produce desired outcomes are repeated
- behaviours that produce aversive consequences are modified or suppressed

Training should aim to get the dog to react in the same way each time it hears a certain command or sees a visual sign from the handler. Officers and staff engaged in the training of police dogs must give due regard to the purpose and justification of actions and decisions of their chosen training plan.

Officers should consider whether the chosen course of action is necessary and balanced against the threat, risk, and harm that could be caused to the dog or any other involved person. The person involved must continually ask themselves:

- what is the nature of incident or circumstances to which I am now responding? E.g., The police dog has failed to release the bite of a suspect when commanded to do so
- is my proposed action a proportionate action? E.g., The utilisation of my force issued bite stick is likely to assist in causing the dog to release, but its use does come with potential risks to the dog's welfare (damage to teeth)
- do my actions, purpose, and objective to stop or prevent further unwanted behaviour, justify the potential risks as outlined above? E.g., The risk associated with the dog not releasing are potential further serious injury to the suspect and/or a breach of their Human Rights
- do I have adequate knowledge or experience to indicate that using alternative methods is not preferable to my proposed action and can I

Speak to someone who does? E.g., Has my use of a bite stick been effective before?

- can I plan a different strategy to achieve the same outcome which is less likely to compromise the Police dog's welfare? E.g., Will repeating the out command likely achieve a different outcome?
- can other resources and methods be used in alternative, preventive ways, to avoid the necessity for punishment? E.g., Do I have access to a toy that might encourage the dog to release the bite? Has my dog undergone sufficient bite training in similar scenarios to prepare us for this? Can this scenario be replicated and trained for in the future?

The information to be gathered should focus on the Past and Present.

4.1.1 Past

This should be the consideration of the dog's history and previous experiences (both known and unknown). Previous training should be considered and previous results from that training.

4.1.2 Present

This is gathering the information in front of you. For instance, what is happening right now and what information can be gathered with regards the dog current state, (both psychological and physical) and the environment?

Evidence suggests that the use of positive reinforcement-based training is the most effective method of training and is the best for dog welfare. All police dog sections should promote positive reinforcement and reward-based methods when training police dogs.

The decision over what is a positive reinforcer should always be the dogs. If something is not rewarding, then it will not improve the likelihood of the behaviour being repeated. Officers should give time in the early stages of relationship building to identify what a dog's preferred reinforcer(s) are. Training with the use of positive punishment should be avoided wherever possible.

The information gathering stage should ensure antecedents (something that happened before the behaviour) are considered in order to achieve the best possible chance of the dog performing the desired behaviour, thereby allowing

positive reinforcement to take place. The antecedent could be both externally (environmental) or internally (previous training experiences) to the dog.

Antecedents affect behaviour and as such they need to be carefully considered when making decisions around training. A change in antecedents should be considered first whenever a dog fails to perform the desired behaviour.

When gathering information there must be a clear definition of what the dog is doing, how we wish the dogs behaviour to change, and what the predictable outcomes are. Behaviour needs to be described specifically and by what the dog is actually doing/ will likely do.

“Hypothetical, psychological constructs (e.g., intelligence, dominance, motivation) and vague, diagnostic labels (aggression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder) are not behaviours -- they are concepts” (Susan G. Friedman, 2009).

The desired behaviour needs should be clearly and specifically detailed to ensure the appropriate action can take place.

4.2 Assessing the Threat and Risk, and Developing a Working Strategy

This focusses on what the possible threats and risks are depending on the outcome of the considered decision. As the gathering of information focuses on the past and present, assessing the threat and risk must focus on the future. The threats and risks should refer to both those associated with the dog itself and any other involved person should the outcome occur as predicted or not. These considerations should include the potential risk of injury (physical and psychological) to the dog and any other person or animal should the intended strategy succeed or fail. The threats and risks considered must be both immediate and longer term in nature.

4.2.1 Specific Risks Associated with the Use of Punishment

A level of confidence and reliability must be obtained around certain behaviours required of a police dog. This is especially important where safety and control are concerned as the consequences of an out of control police dog can be fatal to the public and dog itself. There may be occasions when the use of positive reinforcement alone is not enough to ensure safety and control.

Officers should consider all types of dog training when dealing with a dog's natural instincts and when the particular behaviour that needs to be preventing, is rewarding to the dog.

An example of this may be General Patrol Dog (GPD) engaging in the pursuit, detention, of an aggressive criminal.

If these occasions occur, and the use of positively reinforcing an alternative behaviour is not deemed feasible, the use of positive punishment may be considered, but only as a last resort.

The removal of the opportunity to partake or continue in the undesired behaviour, by blocking or interrupting the behaviour, as well as the training of an alternative behaviour by positive reinforcement will always be considered before the use of positive punishment is used.

The focus is on reinforcing desired behaviour and always asking the question "What do I want the dog to do?"

There is a relationship between a Police handler and their Police dog that differs from most handler and dog relationships. This is due to the fact the dog is expected, at times, to make decisions that go against what the handler may have last asked the dog to do. Only a confident dog will be able to effectively perform this role.

For example: A handler may actually want their dog to pull them towards a hidden suspect, despite previously being asked to walk to heel. Or a handler may need their dog to come to their aid when they are under attack despite being placed in the down position only seconds earlier.

For Police dogs to have the confidence to make these decisions it is imperative that their training is predominantly reward based.

As well as the potential risk of physical harm, the use of punishment-based training has been shown to inhibit a dog's confidence and reduce the likelihood of the dog responding positively to unique situations.

The over reliance on fear or punishment to induce or ensure compliance will likely result in the handler-dog relationship being so damaged, that the outcome is the dog not responding as desired in an emergency situation. Therefore

punishment-based training is likely to significantly effect a Police dog's ability to carry out its role.

The consequences that need considering may either strengthen or weaken behaviours. They may be immediate or longer term. They may also be intentional or unintentional. Therefore, it is imperative that adequate time is taken to consider all the potential consequences to any action or inaction.

4.3 Consider Powers and Policies

All persons involved in the training of Police dogs will consider their actions, or lack of actions, in line with the **Animal Welfare Act 2006, Section 4** - Unnecessary Suffering. Police dogs, like all dogs are classed as "protected animals" and are afforded protection by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which states:

A person commits an offence if—

- (a) an act of his, or a failure of his to act, causes an animal to suffer,
- (b) he knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act, or failure to act, would have that effect or be likely to do so,
- (c) the animal is a protected animal, and
- (d) the suffering is unnecessary.

or...

A person commits an offence if—

- (a) he is responsible for an animal,
- (b) an act, or failure to act, of another person causes the animal to suffer,
- (c) he permitted that to happen or failed to take such steps (whether by way of supervising the other person or otherwise) as were reasonable in all the circumstances to prevent that happening, and
- (d) the suffering is unnecessary.

The case of **(R. (on the application of Gray) v Aylesbury Crown Court [2013] EWHC 500)** confirmed that;

- negligence causing unnecessary suffering to an animal is sufficient to find an offence under s 4 AWA.
and...
- proof of knowledge by (the defendant) that animal showing signs of unnecessary suffering not required.

There is no exemption from this offence for any person involved in the training or care of Police dogs.

The use of any collar designed to deliver an electric current or designed to utilise 'prongs' in order to pinch the dog's skin are strictly prohibited from use by the NPCC Police Working Dog Group.

When considering powers and policy equal consideration should be given to:

Section 3 Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 – Of which Police dogs are only exempt in certain specific circumstances

Article 3 Human Rights Act 1998 (Prohibition of Torture) – Of which Police forces have a positive obligation to prevent. A dog being allowed to bite someone for an unnecessarily long time, or for an unnecessary amount of time may be considered as Torture.

Section 3 Criminal Law Act 1967 (Use of force in making arrest) – A person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime, or in effecting or assisting in the lawful arrest of offenders or suspected offenders or of persons unlawfully at large.

Section 117 PACE 1984. (Power of constable to use reasonable force) – Confers a power on a constable to use reasonable force, if necessary, in the exercise of the power.

Common Law – Common Law recognises the entitlement to defend oneself or another from harm and to defend one's property from damage.

- all persons involved in the training of Police dogs must also constantly consider the Animal Welfare Act 2018
- within in the context of training, Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2018 is of particular relevance. Specifically, the identified needs of an animal:
- its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

- its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

4.4 Identify Options and Contingencies

It is at this point that the knowledge and experiences of the person involved come into effect.

It is beyond the scope of this document to identify all the types, styles and options within dog training. However, it is an integral part of the person's CPD to evidence their continued quest for knowledge to ensure they constantly challenge their own way of thinking and seek to become more rounded dog trainers with a wide range of options and experiences to draw from.

The overarching theme of all dog training must be the welfare of the dog, the effectiveness of the training, and the dogs' enjoyment of the training process. The options taken must reflect this.

Training periods should be enjoyable for the dog and handler. The dog should look forward to learning. Once this atmosphere is established, the dog will begin to enjoy training and the speed of learning will increase. The options identified will be structured, well planned & thought out, thereby enabling a more concentrated reliance on positive reinforcement as a consequence.

4.5 Taking Action and Review

A good dog trainer should constantly review the consequences of their actions. If any method used is not making clear progress towards this goal, it should be stopped and the training plan re-assessed.

Where positive punishment is used in any training, there should be constant dynamic reviews throughout and as soon as practicable, a review of the circumstances should occur so as that the chances of similar negative situations occurring are minimalised. It should incorporate a clear and defined exit strategy for the aversive contingency to be removed as soon as possible. This should be done so that the dog can be positively reinforced for performing a desired behaviour as soon as possible. The exit strategy should be documented within a development plan following consultation between the handler, the instructor, and a supervising officer.

This development plan will be recorded within the dog's personal training file. This strategy should be constantly reviewed during each training session by the handler and instructor and reviewed at the end of each day by the supervising officer. Positive punishment should not be used if there is not a clear and defined exit strategy. Any indication that the dog is not learning from the positive punishment is a sign that abuse is now occurring.

If any persons involved or observing the training suspects this is happening, they must voice their concerns, in line with the Code of Ethics and all training will cease immediately. Consultation must then start between that person and the instructor or person in charge of the training session to ascertain the next appropriate steps. In all cases where the above situations occur, the nominated officer must be informed who will then decide on appropriate action.