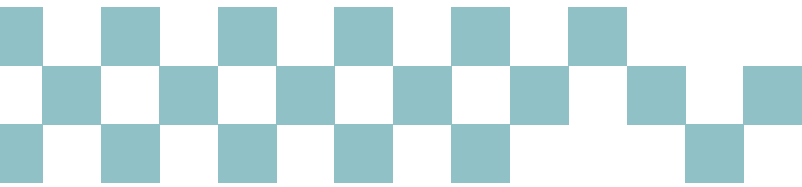


Police Dog Welfare Standard v1



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1 Introduction

This document sets out the minimum standard expected of any organisation linked to the Police Dog APP, NPCC Police Dog Standard and the Police Dog Working Group (PDWG). It sets the minimum standard that organisations must meet in order to protect and enhance the welfare of police dogs when they are both on and off duty.

Chief Constables should ensure they have individual policies, procedures, and risk assessments in relation to the welfare and care of their police Dogs.

This standard is to be read and understood by all dog handlers, trainers, kennel staff and any personnel involved with, and managers responsible for, the care of police dogs. This standard applies to both working dogs kennelled in a home environment or at a centralised location.

The two main pieces of UK legislation that apply to the housing of dogs are:

- **The Animal Welfare Act 2006**
- **Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018**

Although there are no specific regulations directed at police dog kennels, forces must acknowledge that certain practices (breeding, charging for boarding) will require them to comply with the above legislation in relation to housing their dogs.

All dog handlers, trainers, kennel staff and personnel involved with the training, transport and care of working dogs are responsible for working dog welfare and must be trained, and competent in, ensuring that there is good provision for canine welfare and safe handling.

All staff must have a documented continued professional development (CPD) portfolio to ensure they are adequately trained or within the process of being trained to promote the welfare of police dogs.

To assist forces in the writing of their policies, as well as referring to this document, they should also refer to the following advice and guidance:

- Practitioner's Guide to Working Dog Welfare

- **DEFRA Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs**
- **Welsh Government Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs**
- **Scottish Government Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs**
- **Association of Dog and Cat Homes (ADCH) Minimum Welfare and Operational Standards**
- **NPSA Guidance Note: Working dog welfare during kennelling**

2 Monitoring Welfare

All dogs are individuals so may express how they are feeling in different ways. No single physiological or behavioural measure can be used alone to accurately assess a dog's welfare. It is therefore important to consider the following points when monitoring police dog welfare:

- the suitability of the individual dog's environment and daily routine and whether these fulfil the dog's needs
- the individual dog's life history (assessing prior training records and speaking with previous handlers/owners)
- the individual dog's physical, psychological, and mental health (veterinary advice will be sought to effectively monitor this)

2.1 Poor Welfare

Police dogs should be subject to a minimum of twice daily observations in a 24hr period, either by their handler or suitably trained kennel staff if the dog is being kennelled away from home. Daily observations and evaluations of a dog's behaviour and physical state are critical to ensuring good welfare. Some behavioural changes can also indicate underlying health problems.

Behavioural observations will take place during kennelling, exercising, training sessions, operations and/or during transport. Identifying key places and times when particular behaviours occur may aid in understanding what is causing them. As human presence/absence can influence the presentation of some welfare indicators, remote monitoring using video cameras can be a useful way to observe dog behaviour in the absence of people.

What is important when observing for indicators of welfare is the changes in the dog behaviour as well as the behaviour itself and all staff must be trained what to look for, and what action to take should a behavioural change or occurrence indicate that the dog's welfare has been compromised.

2.2 Good Welfare

Despite extensive research into the signs of poor welfare in dogs, there has been considerably less investigation into signs of good welfare (signs that dogs are happy and showing positive emotions).

Signs of good welfare include play behaviour, active exploration of the environment and friendly social interaction with other dogs and/or people. Resting is also sometimes used as a good welfare indicator. However, excessive resting can also indicate poor welfare. For instance, if the dog's environment is insufficiently stimulating or if they are feeling unwell.

As all police dog training promotes the concept of play, all persons involved in the care of police dogs will understand the importance of using positive reinforcement in training to promote good welfare.

The use of positive reinforcement-based training can equally have a positive effect on welfare, as research has shown punishment-based training can have a severely negative effect on welfare.

3 Meeting the Welfare Needs of Police Dogs

The 'Five Needs' are the requirements to meeting the welfare needs of all dogs and are the minimum standards of welfare that all police dogs should experience. These minimum standards are based on recommendations within scientific literature and the **DEFRA Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs**. In addition, **s.9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006** puts a duty on a person responsible for an animal to ensure its welfare. The 5 needs include:

- need for a suitable environment
- need for a suitable diet
- need to be able to exhibit normal behavioural patterns
- need to be housed with, or apart, from other animals
- need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

3.1 Need for a Suitable Environment

All Police dogs must have a safe, secure, and suitable place to rest and relax.

Guidance and advice on good kennel design and protocols include:

- **Guidance for Dog Boarding Establishments 2016**
- **The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018**
- **RSPCA guide covering the kennelling of seized dogs**

Each dog unit will complete and record a risk assessment for each area that the dogs will be expected to live in (no matter how short a time). These risk assessments will be tailored to ensure the welfare of the individual dogs in those particular environments. Assessments should be recorded on the individual forces Risk Assessment Database.

Each dog unit should have a system in place that ensure the staff working within the kennels complete visual examination of all kennel areas at the start and end of the day, as well as when a dog is moved to a new area. If a force has centralised kennels, this will be further backed up by weekly and monthly examinations by the kennel manager, or relevant supervisor. These should be recorded within the dog kennel maintenance records

Police dogs must be provided with a place to live that allows them to move around to ensure their comfort, avoiding becoming too hot or too cold.

Any area that the police dog spends time in will be constructed or adapted to ensure that the size, construction, positioning, lighting, noise levels, and temperature ranges are suitable and beneficial for the particular dog that will be utilising it.

Each dog must have within its personal file details of what bedding and husbandry requirements are needed to ensure the optimum welfare of that individual dog. This will cover when:

- the dog is in its place of normal residence
- being cared for at alternative residence (whilst the handler is on annual leave, etc)
- being contained within a police dog vehicle

These records should be linked to the regular veterinary assessments conducted on the dog and recorded in the personal file.

Dogs that chew the bedding may be particularly in need of additional stimulation so, rather than simply removing the bedding, additional forms of bedding or enrichment (as discussed below, e.g. toys, raised platforms, access to enriched free runs) will also be considered, trialled, and its outcome evidenced.

Care needs be taken when trialling a new type of bedding to ensure that it does not present a choking or blockage risk, should the dog decide to chew it.

Scientific literature highlights that bedding materials, such as straw, can also be used to provide mental stimulation in the kennel, because it provides a new odour and novel material for dogs to explore.

In some circumstances (for example: when a Police dog is travelling within a vehicle) the use of thick rubber matting can be appropriate.

The only exemption for a dog not having any sort of bedding will be following a documented rationale that will include steps taken for a veterinary and behavioural assessment. This must clearly show that multiple bedding substrates have been unsuccessfully considered or trialled, and that bedding is not in the best interests for that particular dog.

3.2 Need for a Suitable Diet

Police dogs must be fed a diet either authorised by their employing organisation or prescribed by their veterinarian. The quantity and type of diet fed will be correct for the age, breed, health, reproductive status, and activity of the dog. It should be correct for the target weight of the dog. The target weight should be set by the veterinarian and consistently assessed by all persons involved in the care of that dog.

The dog's condition should be regularly assessed using a combination of weight and body condition scoring. Suitable Body conditioning charts need to be obtained from a veterinarian.

Any changes in diet will be introduced gradually to avoid gastrointestinal issues. Food storage areas will be kept clean and free from pests.

Food will be stored according to manufacturer recommendations and use-by dates adhered to.

If Raw diets are to be utilised it is essential that a veterinarian is consulted to ensure that the diet fulfils the nutritional needs of that particular dog.

Changes to the diet will only occur if approved by the organisation or veterinarian.

Training treats will be agreed by the organisation or approved by the veterinarian if the dog is on a specific diet for a health condition.

Dogs will have access to fresh, clean drinking water at all times when kennelled. When not kennelled, dogs will be given access to water on a regular basis as needed, and as a minimum every 3 hours.

3.3 Need to be able to Exhibit Normal Behaviour Patterns

When not in training or being deployed, dogs should be given access to objects or structures that provide them with opportunities to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.

Any objects or structures used must be suitable for the individual dog and will not present a risk of injury to them. All items must be checked on a regular basis for wear and tear to prevent the possibility of injury.

Forces should consider the following environmental enrichments:

- physical environment (platforms, layout, physical features/structures)
- degree of social contact (other dogs and humans)
- sensory stimulation (auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory and taste)
- food presentation (schedule, frequency, portion size, type of food and container)
- cognitive engagement (puzzles, tasks, novel activities)

Forces should ensure that police dogs have opportunities to interact directly with people and a varied environment at least twice in a 24hr period. This interaction will include the opportunity for lead walking or free running in a safe environment. Exercise should be physically and mentally enriching.

Police dogs will be taken out of kennels and given opportunities to use a toilet area regularly as needed. Dogs naturally prefer not to urinate or defecate within their kennel and can become distressed if they have to do so.

Risk assessments should be completed before any activity is undertaken with the safety and welfare of all parties being at the forefront of these decisions. Local SOPs in relation to where, when, and whom the dogs interact with, will be followed. The benefits include keeping the dog fit, active and stimulated. Research suggests that ‘if time alone is excessive, you can expect behavioural problems that are distressing for both you and your dog.’

All police dogs will have an individual kennel husbandry record that should document the tools and techniques to be utilised to provide the appropriate kennel enrichment for that particular dog.

Police dogs should be provided with toys and/or feeding enrichment unless a veterinarian or suitably experienced person in dog behaviour, advises otherwise.

3.4 Need to be Housed with, or Apart, from Other Animals

Dogs are social animals and generally find interaction with humans and other compatible dogs very rewarding.

Providing positive interactions on a daily basis with compatible dogs and people, both inside the kennel and external to the kennel environment, can therefore benefit dog welfare.

The provision of daily activities involving suitable people and/or other compatible dogs (e.g. group walks and group exercise in free runs involving dogs which are known to interact in a friendly manner) can also help to reduce fear and distress by helping to ensure dogs are socialised and familiar with a range of kennel staff and their neighbouring animals. It is imperative to assess what type and amount of interaction each individual dog finds rewarding to meet their needs.

Wherever possible and safe to do so, dogs will be encouraged and allowed to have positive interactions with compatible people and dogs.

Positive experiences and the safety of all persons and dogs involved is the utmost priority when fulfilling this need.

Each potential interaction and situation will be individually risk assessed and local SOPs will be adhered to in relation to where, when, and whom the dogs interact with.

The responsibility for the safety of all parties will always be that of the handler.

Dogs which do not enjoy social interaction will not be forced to do so but will be provided with environmental enrichment as an alternative.

When more than one dog is housed or exercised together, care will be taken to provide enough enriching features to avoid competition or monopolisation.

3.5 Need to be Protected from Pain, Suffering, Injury and Disease

All areas that contain police dogs must be cleaned and maintained to a level that prevents spread of disease and illness. This responsibility lies with their handler unless kennelled elsewhere, when the responsibility will fall to appropriately trained kennel staff. The use of chemicals will be monitored to ensure they are safe for use around animals. Cleaning regimes should also be monitored to ensure they are not overpowering and negatively affect the dog's welfare. All police dogs must have a recorded routine healthcare record. This will include details of the dog's vaccination, flea and worming protocols.

Regular health examinations by a dog's handler to assess for skin conditions, oral complaints (redness, swelling or ulceration), feet pad/nail condition etc. may

help to identify areas to be monitored or treated at an early stage. This will occur at least daily, preferably during the dog's grooming routine.

Reward-based training (provision of food treats) should be used to reduce stress associated with physical examinations and other handling/husbandry procedures.

Each Police dog section must have access to housing that is available for sick or injured animals to minimise the risk of transmission to other dogs and assist recovery under the **Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963**.

All organisations involved in the care of police dogs must have (SOPs) in place for emergency care. All staff should be familiar with these SOPs, to know how to carry out basic first aid and to have immediate access to the necessary first aid equipment in an emergency. Up to date veterinary services information should be available at all times. This is particularly important if working in an unfamiliar area or part of the country and details of local veterinary services will be identified prior to deployment. Plans must also be in place to protect dogs and staff in case of fire or other emergencies.

Forces should present police dogs to a veterinary surgeon if there are any concerns over their general health.

4 Expert Welfare Advice and Support

Any dog unit personnel who has concerns about any dog's welfare or behaviour that are not resolved through changes in their environment or routine should seek further expert advice.

Veterinary surgeons are an important first point of call, in order to rule out any health-related issues. Further expert advice on welfare and behavioural issues can be obtained from organisations such as the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) or the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC).

These bodies certify a network of appropriately qualified and experienced clinical animal behaviour experts, who will work with forces to identify problems and suggest structured treatment plans to try to resolve them.

The National Police Chiefs' Council, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and The Dogs Trust have formulated The Animal Welfare Independent Visitor Scheme. This scheme allows police dog units to have their procedures and practices independently scrutinised by members of the local community. This has ensured the confidence in police dog training and welfare has increased and allows member forces to adopt or rehome dogs from Dogs Trust, and other reputable welfare organisations.

Police dog units may become members of The Animal Welfare Independent Visitor Scheme. Those that are not already should consider membership or linking in with other animal charities, welfare organisations, or local authorities that can offer similar services. Forces should detail these decisions in their own SOPS and have clear policies on how they ensure the welfare of their dogs meets the minimum standards.

5 Welfare Concerns Reporting Procedures

5.1 Reporting of Wrongdoing

Chief Constables should have a policy in place that allows and encourages veterinary surgeons to report to the Chief Constable any concerns they may have with regards to the police dogs.

Veterinary surgeons should be reminded that although other police employees may oversee the day-to-day welfare of the police dog, the owner of the police dog remains the Chief Constable.

5.2 Internal Reporting Mechanisms

Chief Constables should have procedures in place which enable police officers and support staff to report concerns regarding unprofessional behaviour so as to secure the welfare of police dogs and ensure any mistreatment is identified and dealt with promptly. This can be through their forces Professional Standards Department, or as a bespoke system within the dog unit.

6 Kennel Design Guidance

All Police boarding kennels built after 30th April 2024 must ensure within the business case for the kennel building, **the following guidance** has been considered.