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Deployment of Wellbeing Dogs Policy (Surrey and Sussex) (1213/2026)

Abstract

This policy provides a consistent approach across Surrey Police and Sussex Police in the deployment of Wellbeing Dogs to support the welfare of police officers and staff. This document has incorporated the Standard Operating Procedures OK9 document while adding any Forces-specific requirements.

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy details the Surrey Police and Sussex Police (hereafter referred to as the Forces) approach to deploying Wellbeing Dogs to support Police officers and staff with their mental resilience.

1.2 This policy will give a consistent approach to the deployment across the Forces areas to ensure clarity for making the request for deployment.

1.3 The policy is intended to give clear definitions of responsibility to all parties involved in the process.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy is intended to compliment the national deployment of Wellbeing Dogs as per the Oscar Kilo Service Level Agreement.

3. Statement

3.1 The Forces and OK9 will provide a framework for the deployment of Wellbeing Dogs to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all individuals and canines during the course of the visit.

The aim of the framework is to assist Wellbeing Dog Handlers with a structured standard operating procedure. This in turn minimises risk to Dog Handlers and maximises the safety and benefits of all who come into contact with the dog and Handler.

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Evidence and studies show that dogs have stress reducing benefits on people, promote happiness and are a welcome distraction to daily lives, even if only for a short time. Scientific research shows that contact with dogs can reduce stress and provide emotional support following traumatic incidents.

Wellbeing Dogs can provide comfort and affection while not being required to perform any specific tasks. Feedback from officers and staff evidenced that a Wellbeing Dog visit left them with positive feelings, a welcome break from computers, reduced stress and was an opportunity to take time out and generally brightened their day.

The objective of OK9 Wellbeing Dogs is to provide these benefits to officers and staff via local arrangements and to maintain a national standard for Wellbeing Dogs and Handlers. The dogs will be specially selected for the role, and the Handlers will be selected for their ability to engage with others, they will be Mental Health First Aiders and Peer Support trained to provide empathy, guidance and sign posting where required.

In the event of a major incident that would benefit from Wellbeing Dogs to provide trauma support an appropriate response will be coordinated by Oscar Kilo if external and our OK9 Coordinator if internal. OK9 Wellbeing Dogs and Handlers may be invited to volunteer their attendance to assist in a wellbeing capacity.

Procedure

1. Introduction

1.1 The Forces have introduced Wellbeing Dogs to:

- Assist with facilitating the flow of conversation;
- Support staff;
- Aid in the Defuse process;
- Boost morale following the involvement of officers and staff in traumatic situations.

2. Visits

2.1 Visits from a wellbeing dog can be arranged as part of the Defuse process or at the request of a supervisor.

2.2 Engagements will mostly be with prior arrangement only. Locations must support the risk assessment and will be prepared and cleaned by the hosting department.

2.3 Due to the dog being classed as "Wellbeing" it is not required to be used in any form of Operational Policing or other work.

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2.4 The Wellbeing Dog will be trained in a variety of capabilities and may be used in the following capacities subject to agreement, with the proper structure, permissions and training being in place and subject to the appropriate risk assessments.

- Departmental Visits.
- Community Events (with a Law Enforcement link).
- Demobilising and Defusing.
- To assist with training and awareness about mental health.
- In schools and educational establishments (considered on a case-by -case basis).
- Within custody or detention areas.
- To assist vulnerable witnesses and/or children while at police stations (but not in interview or court settings). Requests from external sites will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and the presence of the dog and handler should not put any case into jeopardy.
- To promote good mental health of officers and staff.

2.5 In company with the Handler, the dog can attend pre-arranged planned visits when all risk assessments have been shared. Alternative arrangements will be made if any person in any location to be visited suffers from an allergy to dogs or has a phobia or other reason for feeling worried about a dog visit. The location of the visit will be changed to respect that person's welfare and avoid any encounter that would cause embarrassment or discomfort.

The dog will assist the Handler in breaking down barriers with officers, police staff and members of the public and enhance any engagement with police.

3. Visits to non-police sites or events where Surrey Police or Sussex Police are not attending in an official capacity.

3.1 These should be booked directly through the OK9 Team at the College of Policing who will contact appropriate Handlers to arrange directly with them. Please email them for further information.

4. Take a walk

4.1 Handlers are encouraged to maximise their time by walking the dog in suitable location accompanied by attendees. The dog needs exercise, and the Handler needs to interact in an improvised way with the attendees who they would generally be addressing in a structured environment.

5. Events for additional learning needs

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5.1 Attendees with verbal and nonverbal, social or communication difficulties can find it easier to communicate when a dog is present during a session. The presence of a dog can stimulate social communication skills. The dog can be used to break down the barrier that is sometimes there when an officer is trying to engage with a person. The dog can be used as a natural 'ice breaker' to get a conversation flowing. The Handlers should see the dog as a friendly furry 'bridge' that enables a discussion to take place.

6. Surrey Police and Sussex Police Forces – Wellbeing Visits

6.1 Handlers can be invited into departments or meetings to educate and raise awareness, promote good mental health, provide information about services available, to support wellbeing days or to simply raise morale. In order to request a dog visit please visit the Force intranet and input OK9 into the search bar.

7. Headquarters open days, local events and community appearances

7.1 Dogs in any capacity are a popular attraction and the benefits to the service in terms of community relations, positive publicity and public reassurance are immeasurable. Any events are to be planned in advance and authorised by supervisors, the risk assessment is to be completed and reviewed prior to the event.

8. Defuse Session

8.1 To request a dog to attend a defuse session a Defuse Meeting Booking Form must be completed and returned to the appropriate Defuse Co-Ordinator. Further information about Defuse sessions can be found on the Wellbeing Hub.

9. Supervisor Request

9.1 Where a supervisor of a team identifies a lack of morale a Wellbeing Dog visit can be requested using a Wellbeing Dog Visit Booking Form. This must be completed and returned to the appropriate Wellbeing Dog Single Point of Contact (SPOC). Full details can be found on the OK9 Wellbeing Dogs page within the intranet.

10. Dog Handlers

10.1 The Wellbeing Dog role is a supplementary role, and the dog(s) are primarily pet dogs that have been assessed as suitable for this role. The Handlers are suitably trained officers / staff / volunteers who provide this service on a voluntary basis.

10.2 The decision to deploy at the request of staff will be the sole decision of the Handler. This will take place in line with the College of Policing National Decision Model (NDM) and Code of Ethics utilised within the police service.

10.3 In that case of smaller visits to offices and for walks, Dog Handlers are not required to complete a written risk assessment. In that case of smaller visits to offices and for walks, Dog Handlers are not required to complete a written risk assessment but must ensure all colleagues are happy to receive a dog visit prior to entering the site and to assess situations on an ongoing basis.

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10.4 In the case of larger events such as school visits the Dog Handler will conduct a Wellbeing Dogs Risk Assessment form which will be retained for future reference and a copy of the risk assessment given to the contact at the school / location.

10.5 Dog Handlers may also request feedback from a visit to look for ways to improve the service.

10.6 The Handler can decline any request or cancel any deployment at any time and must inform the SPOC of their rationale.

10.7 The Handler has overall responsibility for the welfare, care, training, and development of the dog.

10.8 The Handler is responsible for arranging for suitable pet insurance for the dog and for ensuring a copy of the insurance certificate is given to the SPOC for filing in the Wellbeing Teams / Deployment of Wellbeing Dogs Policy file.

10.9 The Handler is to withdraw the dog from this role if they feel the temperament required is not met.

10.10 The Handler is to monitor any incidents and report any such incident via the OK9 Incident report to the Force SPOC as the earliest opportunity.

10.11 Each Handler will receive Mental Health First Aid / Peer Supporter training to equip them to best support any persons they find in need of such help.

10.12 Dogs will be supervised at all times during the visit and will be taken out at regular intervals to ensure time is allowed for toilet duties, food / water or exercise / breaks. Dogs are to be fully inoculated and have regular treatment and vet checks.

10.13 Handlers request that the dogs are not given any food, other than supervised dog treats and treated with kindness.

10.14 Should the dogs present as scared, distressed, or overwhelmed, the Handler will remove them away from the area until it is decided that the animal's wellbeing is checked and ok. The Handler is ultimately responsible for the deployment of the dogs and therefore has the right to remove from any circumstance, area or location that is not appropriate.

10.15 Handlers are responsible for the completion of all mandatory training set by the Oscar Kilo / Dog Trust for this role.

10.16 During the visit Handlers and dogs should wear OK9 branded clothing / jacket to identify themselves. The Handler should also use the 'OK9 Wellbeing Dog in Operation' sign to identify to all present that there is a dog in the area. The dog should wear their OK9 livery and must remain on a lead whilst indoors unless agreed by the room it is visiting.

11. Welfare

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11.1 The dog is owned by the Handler and suitable insurance to cover Public Liability up to 1 million pounds must be in place. Any dog health insurance is a matter for the Handler to consider.

12. Dog Retirement

12.1 A Wellbeing Dog would be retired for a variety of reasons, including:

- Completion of the dogs working life.
- The dog becoming unsuitable for working.
- Grounds of ill health.
- The dog no longer enjoys the work.
- The Handler's retirement / transfer / resignation from the service.

13. Five Welfare Needs

13.1 The Five Welfare Needs are listed in the [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#) and apply to anyone with a responsibility for an animal (thereby applicable to Handlers and their Wellbeing Dogs). It is the Handler's responsibility to ensure that they meet their dog's five needs:

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

14. Care and Exercise

14.1 Dogs are highly social animals and where possible OK9 recommends that the dogs are kept within family homes to enjoy the company of people. Dogs owned / belonging to Handlers will reside in the family home. A collar or other means of identification will be worn by the Wellbeing Dog at all times. All dogs are microchipped. The Handler is to ensure that feeding guides are followed. The Handler is to ensure that the dog is in a fit and healthy condition.

15. Veterinary Records and Animal Welfare Organisations

15.1 Veterinary records will be maintained for Wellbeing Dogs. Records must be kept detailing any treatment, inoculations, and medical history. In addition, a record of the

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dog's weight, worming tablets administered and any first aid / treatment given as required by the local Wellbeing Dog scheme lead. These should all be recorded on the OK9 Handlers member pages. Access is found on Oscar Kilo 9: Wellbeing and trauma support dogs. Records will be made available for supervision or Animal Welfare Lay Visitors. The Handler / owner is to be ultimately accountable for the health, fitness, and welfare of their dog.

16. Dog Welfare

16.1 The Wellbeing Dog Handler will be responsible for the welfare of their dogs. The Animal Welfare Visitor Scheme may operate across the Wellbeing Dog scheme. Visitors can be accompanied by professionals from animal welfare organisations, to observe and report upon conditions under which Wellbeing Dogs are housed, trained, transported, and utilised.

17. Dog Transportation

17.1 Wellbeing Dogs are to be transported in a suitable cage in the rear of the vehicle or appropriately secured by way of harness and seatbelt clip or other safe method of transport.

18. Equipment

18.1 All leashes, harnesses and collars etc. are to be suitable and be of sufficient design to ensure that the likelihood of breakage is minimised. Dog toys are to be of a suitable size to reduce the likelihood of the dog swallowing it. Dog collars designed to give electric shock, and pinch collars are not to be used in any way.

19. Adverse Incidents

19.1 In the unlikely event of an adverse incident the Force SPOC and OK9 Lead should be informed as soon as practicable by completing an OK9 Incident Reporting Form and the dog withdrawn from service IMMEDIATELY. Appropriate injury on duty forms must be completed in line with policy. The dog will not return to service until a full investigation and assessment of the dog has been conducted to determine the reason for the incident occurring and to ensure there is no future risk of reoccurrence.

Surrey – report injury on duty: 12/2 Health and Safety Incident Reporting Form.

Sussex – report injury on duty: Workplace Incident.

20. Further Information

20.1 OK9 FAQ pages

Team: People Services Department