

## **PROTECTIVE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 22 JUNE 2010**

### **DOG UNIT**

#### **REPORT BY CHIEF CONSTABLE**

##### **Introduction**

- 1.1 The Dog Unit is part of the Operations Department within Sussex Police. The unit has 30 general purpose dog handlers based throughout the County, 9 of which dual handle specialist search dogs and in addition there are 9 explosive search dog handlers at Gatwick Airport.
- 1.2 This report will cover the different areas of work that the Dog Unit are involved in to support all Divisions.

##### **Divisions**

- 2.1 The target within the Departmental Policing Plan 2009-2010 was for the Dog Unit to assist in the arrest of 1,300 suspects. The actual target achieved was 1,136. In addition to arrests dog handlers attended 11,051 incidents in 2009-10. During the 2009-10 policing plan year the dog unit attended 449 searches for drugs, cash and firearms recovering £2,203,995 worth of drugs.
- 2.2 The Dog Unit support divisional staff in dealing with dangerous dogs and offer advice regarding offences and the seizure of dogs. All handlers have been given a training input on this. The Dog Unit has a dedicated Dog Legislation Officer who is trained to identify Pit Bull type of dogs and offers expert advice. This has financial benefits as we no longer have to pay for an officer from the Metropolitan Police to assess the dogs thereby saving £200 per visit and makes best use of the skilled resources we have.

##### **Operational Benefits**

- 3.1 The general purpose police dogs offer a number of specialist skills including tracking to suspects, searching for property and detaining suspects. The deployment of dogs in these situations can add significant evidence to aid a successful prosecution as well as detaining suspects at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.2 The Dog Unit support public order units in a number of public order incidents. During Operation Adio they were key in preventing protestors accessing the site after a rear fence was breached.
- 3.3 The Dog Unit currently has five Firearms Support Dogs who support the TFU during pre-planned and spontaneous incidents. In 2009-10 they attended 213 incidents. There is a unit plan to train and select suitable dogs and handlers for this role on an annual basis. Five handlers will be attending a course in June which will increase the numbers of accredited dogs to 10.

- 3.4 Operation Kirkland was a project funded by Department for Transport (DfT) to assess the ability of training one dog to do two very different disciplines. The project has trained the dogs to remotely search people for explosives and also as a conflict management dog. The project has concluded and the dogs have been deployed as conflict management dogs giving firearms commanders an additional tactic for dealing with high threats posed by physically passive persons.
- 3.5 The use of the scent discrimination dog to search for missing persons can dramatically reduce the officer hours used to search and ultimately save lives. A project is being looked at to assess and train general purpose dogs to carry out this task and increase the capability to the force.
- 3.6 The current shift pattern of working 0900x0400 has been in place for 12 months. This shift pattern has seen an increase in handlers on duty at peak operational times and has seen an increase in support to divisional staff.

## **Gatwick**

- 4.1 Gatwick Dog Unit has been under the line management of the Dog Unit Inspector for the last 2 years. This has enabled a better working relationship between both units and allowed for the sharing of skills between both teams. There are also financial benefits in the joint purchase of equipment and dog food.
- 4.2 The team at Gatwick provide support to the protective security policing operation at the airport both as support to the firearms teams and during independent patrol.
- 4.3 The unit provides support to all of the pre-searching for operations throughout the county during VIP visits.
- 4.4 Gatwick handlers will be working with DfT on a project to assess the ability to passively screen passengers with dogs on entering central search. This supports the Government directive to increase the number of travellers screened on entering the restricted zone.

## **Dog Welfare**

- 5.1 Dog welfare is paramount to keeping the unit available to carry out their role. The Dog Unit Inspector has changed the dog food to a better quality food to assist in prolonging the working life of the dog. Cutting edge veterinary techniques have been used to repair injuries to dogs which has allowed dogs to continue to work where previously they would have been retired.
- 5.2 The issue of accommodation for dogs is being addressed in order to accommodate dogs around the county that are easily accessible to all handlers. This will also provide exercise for the dogs.
- 5.3 The Unit has developed a Puppy Scheme over the last 18 months that selects puppies from proven breeders and homes them in vetted puppy walkers

homes. The puppies are regularly seen and assessed before they are allocated to a handler prior to their initial course.

## **Conclusion**

- 6.1 The Dog Unit has seen a number of significant changes over the last two years. These changes have provided the force with an efficient, focused team that is committed to providing an effective resource to support the policing of Sussex.
- 6.2 As it stands currently, the Authority does not have a Lead Member oversight of the Dog Unit to support and scrutinise the work of this important resource. The Committee may wish to consider appointing a Lead Member for the Dog Unit.

## **Recommended - That**

- (1) The progress made is supported by the Authority; and
- (2) The Committee considers the appointment of a Lead member for the Dog Unit.

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