Key points to consider when specifying, procuring and implementing detection dog services

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Scope

This short guidance document is intended to help those responsible for an organisation or site's security to procure effective detection dog services that meet their security needs. It outlines the steps necessary – from identifying the Operational Requirement, through procurement to successful implementation.

It should be noted that there is (currently) no UK Government-recognised scheme for assuring private sector detection dog capability (except for specific, regulated aviation security applications). Following the steps outlined in this document should, however, help reduce the risk of procuring a service that is not fit for purpose.

Understanding your requirement

- Be clear about your Operational Requirement
  - What threats and risks are you trying to mitigate that detection dogs might help address?
    - What threat items?
      - Explosive materials and / or devices?
        - Including fireworks, pyrotechnics, flares?
      - Firearms and / or ammunition?
      - Drugs?
      - Electronic items?
    - In what context?
      - Entering your building or site in vehicles? (Cars, vans, lorries, etc?)
      - Entering your building or site in deliveries and / or mail?
      - Brought in by people (staff, contractors, visitors, the general public)?
      - Hidden or otherwise left behind in your building / on your site?
      - Screening people or items leaving your building or site for loss-prevention purposes?
  - How might detection dog capability contribute to the security of your organisation/site, and complement other security measures?
    - In addition to their ability to detect threats, and be deployed flexibly, dog teams can provide visible reassurance to the public while deterring those with hostile intent.

Operational considerations

- A handler and a dog should be regarded as a team – detection capability results from them working effectively together.
  - A dog should only have one handler, though a handler may have up to two dogs (for example, allowing one dog to work while the other rests).
  - A skilled handler knows how to get the best out of their dog – and should be proactive at spotting and acting when the dog isn't performing to the best of its ability.
- Like people, dogs can suffer from fatigue and/or boredom, both of which will affect their performance.

- o There are no definitive rules as to how long a dog can work effectively for, either without a break or overall within a working day; it will depend on a variety of factors including the nature and intensity of the search task, the age and breed of dog, and the ambient temperature.
    - Where a dog is working continuously, for example searching a constant stream of vehicles arriving at a site entrance, it may well need a break after around 20 – 30 minutes.
  - o A good handler will know their dog and recognise when it needs a rest or a break; this is one of the reasons why it is strongly recommended that a dog should always work with the same handler, and why a handler may have two dogs (working one while the other rests).
- A team (handler and dog) should only be deployed for roles in which they have suitable training and experience *as a team*, and can demonstrate competence.
  - o Do *not* allow mission-creep. For example, a dog team that has only been trained for, and demonstrated competence at, screening vehicles should *not* be deployed to search a building (until they have undergone the necessary additional training and demonstrated competence). Even though the dog may *appear* to search the building effectively, it may not have the skills and experience to recognise trained (threat) odours in that environment.
  - o A dog should only be trained to detect explosives *or* firearms *or* other specific classes of threat. Where this is not the case and a dog is trained across multiple threat classes, there is a risk that an inappropriate emergency response is initiated in response to the dog indicating, for example a response appropriate for detection of explosives is initiated when in fact traces of drugs were actually present.
  - o It is important to understand the provenance and history of a dog. The detection dog service provider should maintain, and hence be able to provide, a full record of the dog's life, including any medical history, training and operational experience. Consider reviewing this. The dog should be uniquely identifiable by a microchip.
    - Has the dog previously been 'retired' for inadequate performance?
    - Has the dog previously been trained, for example, to detect drugs but is now being marketed as an explosives detection dog?
- Understand your detection dog service provider's commitment to, and investment in, operating to the highest standards and latest good practice. How does this apply to training (both initial and on-going) and animal welfare, and to continuing professional development of their handlers?
  - o Ask to see training records for any new dog teams engaged, and consider reviewing/auditing periodically and on contract renewal.
  - o Are training records well-structured, detailed, and up to date?
  - o Are issues that occur – whether in training or operationally – noted, with training needs identified and their timely completion to a suitable standard evidenced?
  - o Do explosives detection dog teams have regular opportunities to train on a wide variety of threat-relevant explosives (spanning commercial, military and home-made materials of different origins, ages and quantities)?
    - *There are significant health and safety, security and administrative burdens associated with storing explosives and using them for training detection dog*

teams. Regular access to a broad range of samples is key to developing and maintaining a robust detection dog capability.

- o Are training and assessment sessions operationally relevant and realistic? Are they well matched to the types and sizes of threats, concealments, and types of searches identified in your operational requirement?
- o Are training and assessment sessions led by an independent instructor?
- o Do the handlers keep up to date on, and follow, latest good practice, for example the latest HM Government [Detection Dog Guidance Notes](#)? What other continuing professional development do they do?

- Be clear about what capability your dog teams do (and don't) offer.
  - o No individual security measure is perfect, but a layered approach combining multiple different effectively implemented security measures can be very hard to defeat.
  - o Are there other measures you can add (or adapt) that would usefully complement your detection dog capability?

- Be clear and realistic about how to respond when a dog 'indicates'.
  - o Dogs are trained to 'indicate' (e.g. freezing or sitting, looking in the direction of the source of the odour) when they smell a scent that they have been trained to detect.
  - o This does *not* necessarily mean that a material of concern is present in a quantity that poses a threat. For example, an explosives detection dog may detect some contamination on someone who legitimately works with explosives. Or, the dog may simply smell something benign that it thinks smells similar to a trained material.
  - o Dogs may also show 'interest' where they encounter an odour that is similar, but not identical to, a trained one. Such 'interest' may be quite obvious or very subtle. As there are a very wide variety of potential threat materials (e.g. commercial, military and home-made explosives) and their odour may also vary with factors such as age and differing storage conditions, spotting and acting on 'interest' is essential. Again, a handler who knows their dog well should easily spot signs of 'interest'.
  - o It is essential that all 'indications' and signs of 'interest' are investigated appropriately as part of a defined escalation process; unless there are other robust indicators or intelligence that a threat is present, it will not normally be appropriate to immediately initiate a full emergency response.

- Ensure your site's security operating procedures – including escalation and emergency response protocols – cover your detection dog capability.

Legislation and Standards

- There is (currently) no UK Government-recognised scheme for assuring private sector detection dog capability (except for specific, regulated aviation security applications).
  - o It is good practice for detection dog service providers to demonstrate compliance with *BS8517-2 Security Dogs Part 2 – Code of Practice for the use of Detection Dogs*. This provides a valuable foundation for, but does not in itself guarantee, effective capability.
- A dog handler should have the appropriate SIA licence where their role is deemed a licensable activity.

- It is essential that you consider the health and safety, and animal welfare, implications of deploying detection dog teams on your premises.
- You have no right to search or screen people or their possessions, but may make compliance with security measures a condition of entry to your site.
    - Some people may object to being screened by a detection dog for cultural, religious or other reasons; it is essential that you have alternative search procedures in place to accommodate to such requests.

Effective procurement – getting the detail right

- As with any other procurement activity, take appropriate steps to ensure your chosen detection dog service provider(s) meets your needs (as identified through your operational requirements), and that they fully understand your requirements.
- Ensure key details are formalised in your procurement arrangements with your detection dog service provider(s); many of the points raised in this guidance note may be relevant. In addition:
    - Consider whether you always want the same teams (handlers and dogs) – you may wish to issue them with access control passes – or whether you will accept any teams your provider offers on a given day. Will you tolerate sub-contracting? And if so, how will that be managed and quality assured?
    - Where you always require the same teams, how will absences (leave, sickness, etc.) be accommodated?
    - Where you always require the same teams, but not full-time, do you have any concerns about where else the teams may be deployed?
    - Under what circumstances might you wish to uplift or otherwise alter your detection dog service requirements? And how would your chosen supplier propose to meet such requests?
- Does your supplier have any requirements of your organisation/site – e.g. shaded space to park dog vans, or areas to train, rest and/or exercise dogs?

Summary

Training and maintaining an effective detection dog capability is a resource-intensive activity. An effective capability is unlikely to be cheap, but can be deployed flexibly where it will offer most significant security, reassurance and deterrence benefit. As with all security measures, it is essential to understand your operational requirement and take all appropriate steps to ensure any contracted detection dog service meets your site or organisation's particular needs.