

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE USE OF RIPA POWERS

Head of Service:	Andrew Bircher, Interim Director of Corporate Services
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Appendices (attached):	None

Summary

To report on the Council's activities relating to surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) for 2023.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Note the annual report of the Council's use of its RIPA powers in 2023.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 This is the required annual report to provide details of any surveillance carried out by the Council under RIPA powers. For 2023 there were no such surveillance activities carried out.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Council undertakes a number of functions which involve the enforcement of laws and regulation. On occasion, Officers may need to conduct investigations and, in exceptional circumstances, the Council has the power to make use of covert surveillance and similar activities.
- 2.2 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and the Codes of Practice issued under section 71 of that Act, regulates the way in which the Council conducts surveillance for the purposes of law enforcement.
- 2.3 The fundamental requirement of RIPA is that when the Council considers undertaking directed surveillance or using a covert human intelligence source it must only do so if:
 - a) the activity has been authorised by an Officer with appropriate powers, and

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b) the relevant criteria are satisfied, including authorisation by the Magistrates Court.

- 2.4 All RIPA surveillance which the Council wishes to authorise must be approved by an Authorising Officer and also be approved by a Magistrate. Where a Local Authority wishes to seek to carry out a directed surveillance or make use of a human intelligence source the Council must apply to a single Justice of the Peace. The Home Office issued guidance to Local Authorities and to Magistrates on the approval process for RIPA authorisations.

Inspections

- 2.5 The Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office has responsibility to oversee the exercise of the use by Councils of their surveillance powers.
- 2.6 An inspection was carried out in 2020, by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office. There were no recommendations which the Council was asked to implement. A further assessment is due this year.
- 2.7 The Council has a Policy & Guidance on Lawful Surveillance, Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and this has been updated to reflect changes in personnel.
- 2.8 Even though the Council does not often use its powers under the Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act, it remains critical for Officers to understand how to operate the Council's Surveillance Policy. The last training exercise was delivered in 2022.

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- 2.9 There were no applications for directed surveillance authorisations in 2023.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1.1 Use of investigatory powers potentially engages the Human Rights Act 1998 and in particular the qualified right to private and family life under article 8 of the European Convention. This right may only be interfered with in circumstances where it is necessary and proportionate to do so in pursuit of the public interest. The Council's RIPA Policy & Guidance document is designed to facilitate compliance with the Human Rights Act.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

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3.2.1 It is important to ensure regulatory investigative procedures are kept up to date and once the current Inspection is completed any recommendations will be included as part of the review

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 No issues arise from this report.

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None

3.5 Other

3.5.1 None

4 Financial Implications

4.1 No direct implications.

4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 **Legal Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- This report is linked to the council's priority for Safe and Well

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** N/a

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** n/a

6.5 **Partnerships:** n/a

7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Audit & Scrutiny Committee (April 2023) *Annual report of the use of RIPA powers*. Online available: <https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=157&MId=1254> [last accessed 09/02/2024, item no. 39].

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Other papers:

- None.