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**PART A: MATTERS DEALT WITH UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

**REPORT TO: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 16 FEBRUARY 2023**

**REPORT OF THE: HEAD OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

**TITLE OF REPORT: UPDATE ON USE OF REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA)**

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report provides details of the use of covert surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act by Ryedale District Council.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 That Members note that no application for covert surveillance has been made to the Council's approved "Authorising Officers" in the last twelve months and as a consequence no application to the Magistrates Court requesting approval of any such grant has been made.

### **3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

3.1 To ensure oversight by Members of the Council's compliance with the legislation.

### **4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS**

4.1 There are no significant risk management/assessment implications arising from this proposed decision.

## **REPORT**

## 5.0 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

- 5.1 The role of local government is bound by a wide breadth of statutory duties and powers. Local authorities have a wide range of prosecution powers in discharging their regulatory roles.
- 5.2 Currently (in England and Wales) local authorities can bring their own prosecutions based on their own investigations by their own departments – including housing benefit, environmental health, fly tipping, dangerous dogs, food safety, listed building control, planning control and health and safety.
- 5.3 When taking enforcement action, the Council’s enforcing officers may on occasion consider it necessary to undertake covert surveillance work in order to undertake the Council’s statutory duties or “core work”. For example, covert surveillance may be necessary to observe individuals who may be suspected of benefit fraud.
- 5.4 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) was enacted to protect the human rights of individuals who are the subject of covert investigatory techniques, and others who might be affected by collateral intrusion. Contrary to widespread misreporting in the media, it is not anti-terrorism legislation and it did not give local authorities access to covert investigatory techniques for the first time. RIPA merely provides a regulatory framework for the exercise of existing powers which is transparent, addresses human rights issues and has clearly defined authorisation processes. The Council acts in accordance with the legislation and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) Policy.
- 5.5 RIPA controls the use of covert surveillance operations by the Council when undertaking its various enforcement functions. In essence, RIPA imposes a requirement that an investigating officer cannot use covert surveillance as a method of gathering evidence unless they have first obtained a proper authorisation by an officer of senior rank. RIPA requires that formal “Authorisation” from a senior officer must be obtained before carrying out covert surveillance, monitoring and other evidence-gathering activities.
- 5.6 The investigating officer must make a written application describing the proposed surveillance activity and giving details of the reasons for it, the person or persons who will be the subject of the surveillance, and what evidence the surveillance is intended to obtain. The authorising officer must be satisfied that the proposed surveillance is both **necessary** and **proportionate** in the circumstances and that there is no other reasonable method of achieving the desired outcome.
- 5.8 RIPA requires the Council to have in place procedures to ensure that when required, surveillance is necessary and is properly authorised. Surveillance is usually a last resort that an investigator will use to prove or disprove an allegation. RIPA sets out a statutory mechanism for authorising covert surveillance and the use of covert human intelligence sources.
- 5.9 Any such Authorisation granted must be supported by an Order approving the grant or renewal of such Authorisation from a JP (either a District Judge or lay magistrate) before it can take effect.

## **6.0 POLICY CONTEXT**

- 6.1 Surveillance of illegal activity can take place as part of a number of Council regulatory functions which contribute to improving the district as a place to live.
- 6.2 Whilst the Council is not usually a user of covert surveillance, such methods are used where it is considered necessary and proportionate to do so in order to help achieve the Council's priorities, particularly in relation to the protection of the public and the environment.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Senior Council officers have contributed to the preparation of the report.

## **8.0 REPORT DETAILS**

- 8.1 Systems have been in place since RIPA came into force and include guidance notes on the Council's Intranet, periodic training for officers, and advice and oversight from Legal Services. One of the requirements of the regime is that a central record of authorisations be kept. This is kept and maintained securely by the Head of Corporate Governance and Solicitor.
- 8.2 The Home Office has issued detailed Codes of Practice on compliance with RIPA's provisions together with standard authorisation forms. RIPA requires that only a "Director, Head of Service or Service Manager or equivalent are lawfully entitled to authorise covert techniques. The list of authorising officers is listed in Appendix 1 of the Council's RIPA and IPA policy.
- 8.3 It is emphasised that the use of covert investigatory techniques should, in all cases, be the last resort and the only ground upon which an authorisation may be granted is for the purposes of preventing or detecting a criminal offence, which must be punishable by a maximum term of at least 6 months' imprisonment (with an exception relating to sale of alcohol and tobacco to children). In addition, as previously mentioned, local authority RIPA authorisations must be approved by the Magistrates' Court.
- 8.4 Although RIPA covers a number of activities undertaken by investigatory bodies (e.g., phone tapping by the Security Services and Police) its principle use in respect of Local Authorities relates to:
- covert surveillance, and
  - covert human intelligence sources.
- 8.5 Covert surveillance covers the monitoring, observing or listening to persons, their movements, conversations or other activities and communications in a way that is calculated to ensure that persons who are subject to surveillance are unaware. It may be conducted with or without the assistance of a surveillance device and includes the recording of any information obtained. RIPA is most relevant to the Council's activities in effecting enforcement procedures such as the investigation and prosecution of offences. This would not include the initial investigation of contraventions such as planning enforcement or noise investigations. The Council's

use of the powers has been very limited in recent years. For example, the Council has not used authorisations under the Act in the last ten years.

- 8.6 Covert human intelligence sources relate to the use of a third party to gather information. For example, this could be an informer or someone used to undertake test purchases. This is not an activity that the Council engages in at all. The Council also needs the approval of a magistrate to carry out this activity.
- 8.7 The only area in which the Council very occasionally involves itself where RIPA might be relevant is covert surveillance. It is necessary for the Council therefore to follow the legislation and the requirements of Government Codes of Practice. Most of the requirements of the Code are dealt with at an Officer level. However, Members are expected to have some involvement in the monitoring of how the Council implements RIPA requirements.
- 8.8 The Investigatory Powers Commissioner held a remote inspection of the Council's RIPA arrangements in October 2021. The overall outcome of the inspection was positive, confirming that all recommendations from the previous inspection had been discharged and that a physical inspection was not currently required. Some remedial work was recommended to the Council's guidance document and this work is underway.

## 9.0 IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The following implications have been identified:

- a) Financial  
None arising from the report.
- b) Legal

Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides: "Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence."

There can be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society for the purpose of the prevention of disorder or crime.

The right to non-interference with an Article 8 right is not absolute. It is a qualified right. This means that in certain circumstances the Council *may* interfere with the right if the interference is:

- in accordance with the law
- necessary, and
- proportionate

- c) Other (Equalities, Staffing, Planning, Health & Safety, Environmental and Climate Change, Crime & Disorder)  
None arising from the report.

**Name of Service Lead**                      **Nicki Lishman**  
**Job Title**                                        **Acting Head of Corporate Governance**

**Author:**                                         **Palbinder Mann**  
**Telephone No:**                                **01653 600666 Ext 43347**  
**E-Mail Address:**                              [palbinder.mann@ryedale.gov.uk](mailto:palbinder.mann@ryedale.gov.uk)

**Background Papers:**

1. [Home Office Guidance - Covert Surveillance and Property Interference \(August 2018\)](#)
2. [Home Office Guidance – Covert Human Intelligent Sources \(August 2018\)](#)
3. [Home Office Guidance - Protection of Freedoms Act 2012- changes to the provisions under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers 2000 \(October 2012 \)](#)
4. [Office of Surveillance Commissioners - Procedures and Guidance \(July 2016\)](#)
5. [Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 \(RIPA\) and Investigatory Powers Act 2016 \(IPA\) Policy and Guidance Notes](#)

**Background Papers are available for inspection at:** [www.ryedale.gov.uk](http://www.ryedale.gov.uk)