

Title: Annual Review of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Policy

Lead Officer: Richard Barr

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Davison

Wards of the District directly affected: None directly impacted

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	14/03/24	Councillor Davison
Finance	14/03/24	Andrew Rollins
Legal Services	Not applicable	
Chief Executive	14/03/24	Chris Elliott
Director of Climate Change	Not applicable	
Head of Service(s)	14/03/24	Andrew Rollins
Section 151 Officer	14/03/24	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	14/03/24	Graham Leach
Leadership Co-ordination Group	14/03/24	Various
Governance Questions	Answers	
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Final decision by this Committee.	
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No/Yes	
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?	No/Yes, Paragraphs:	
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	No/Yes, Forward Plan item 1443 – scheduled for 10 April 2024	
Accessibility Checked?	Yes/No	

Summary

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) provides the circumstances in which a local authority may use surveillance techniques to prevent and detect crime. Each local authority should have a policy in place, which sets out the circumstances in which these powers may be used and the procedure to be followed.

Recommendation

That Cabinet should review and then, if satisfied, approve the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Policy.

1 Reason for the Recommendations

- 1.1 The Home Office's Code of Practice on Covert Surveillance and Property Interference provides guidance on the use by public authorities of Part II of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act ("the 2000 Act") regarding covert surveillance that is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person. Paragraph 4.47 of the Code states that: "Elected members of a local authority should review the authority's use of the 1997 Act and the 2000 Act and set the policy at least once a year."

2 Background/Information

- 2.1 The Investigatory Powers Commission (IPCO) is responsible for providing independent oversight of the use of investigatory powers by public bodies which are undertaken under the RIPA and is responsible for undertaking inspections to ensure compliance.
- 2.2 The Home Office's Code of Practice on Covert Surveillance and Property Interference (click [here](#) for link) provides guidance on the use by public authorities of Part II of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act ("the 2000 Act") in respect of covert surveillance that is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person. The Code provides guidance on when an application should be made for an authorisation under the 2000 Act and the procedures that must be followed before activity takes place. The Code also provides guidance on the handling of any information obtained by surveillance activity.
- 2.3 The Code also applies to the entry on, or interference with, property or with wireless telegraphy by public authorities.
- 2.4 The Code is issued pursuant to Section 71 of the 2000 Act and is intended for use primarily by the public authorities able to authorise activity under the 2000 Act, the Intelligence Services Act 1994 ("the 1994 Act") and Part III of the Police Act 1997 ("the 1997 Act").
- 2.5 The 2000 Act provides that all codes of practice issued under the Act are admissible as evidence in criminal and civil proceedings. Any court or tribunal considering such proceedings may take the provisions of the codes of practice into account.

- 2.6 Paragraph 4.47 of the Code states that: "Elected members of a local authority should review the authority's use of the 1997 Act and the 2000 Act and set the policy at least once a year. They should also consider internal reports on use of the 1997 Act and the 2000 Act on a regular basis to ensure that it is being used consistently with the local authority's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose." Although RIPA has not been used by the Council for a very long time, the Council has certain powers which may be applied should it be necessary.
- 2.7 It is for this reason – "Elected members...should review the authority's use of (its powers granted by legislation)...and set the policy at least once a year" - that the policy is being re-presented to Members for review and approval.
- 2.8 The Council's RIPA Policy is set out as Appendix 1. The Policy also requires a sub-policy covering the use of social media and setting out the circumstances when a RIPA authorisation would be required. This is set out as Appendix 1.1.
- 2.9 The RIPA Policy was updated following an inspection of the Council's RIPA policy and procedures during 2020 by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner. The report that followed concluded: "Your organisation appears to be in good hands through a knowledgeable RIPA Coordinator and a well-informed Senior Responsible Officer."
- 2.10 A small number of recommendations were identified, all of which have now been actioned. Most of these required slight updates to the RIPA Policy while one required relevant staff - including the Chief Executive as the RIPA Authorising Officer and the Deputy Chief Executive as the Senior Responsible Officer - receiving awareness training on a refresher basis.
- 2.11 It should be noted that, although we are required to have a RIPA Policy, the powers have not had to be used for a number of years (at least five).

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 The report is not based on 'project appraisal' so this section is not applicable.

4 Legal Implications

- 4.1 The report is concerned with compliance with legislation.

5 Financial

- 5.1 There are no financial implications in connection with this report.

6 Corporate Strategy

- 6.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Corporate Strategy that sets three strategic aims for the organisation. Although this report does not directly relate to the delivery of these aims it does underpin good governance of the Council. Each proposed decision should set out how the report contributes to the delivery of these strategic aims. If it does not contribute to these aims or has a negative effect on them the report should explain why that is the case.

- Delivering valued, sustainable services.
- Low cost, low carbon energy across the district.
- Creating vibrant, safe and healthy communities of the future.

7 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

7.1 None identified.

8 Analysis of the Effects on Equality

8.1 An effective policy in this field will help the Council achieve its Equality objectives and obligations.

9 Data Protection

9.1 An effective policy in this field will help the Council achieve its data protection objectives and obligations.

10 Health and Wellbeing

10.1 An effective policy framework can help the Council achieve its health and wellbeing objectives and obligations.

11 Risk Assessment

11.1 Clearly there are governance-related risks associated with weak regulatory compliance, but the policy will help to mitigate these. Non or weak compliance will expose the Council to legal action being brought against it, with the prospect of financial penalties and reduction in reputation should the Council be found to have acted unlawfully.

Background papers:

None.

Supporting documents:

Home Office's Code of Practice on Covert Surveillance and Property Interference (Revised) 2018.