

AUDIT COMMITTEE

23rd APRIL 2024

Report of the Head of Democracy

Part A

COUNCIL'S USE OF REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (RIPA)

Purpose of Report

To provide the Committee with a summary of the Council's use of RIPA powers.

Recommendation

The Committee notes that there has been no use of RIPA powers by the Council for the period from 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024.

Reason

To enable the Committee to comply with the request from Cabinet that the Audit Committee assumes responsibility for receiving a quarterly report on the use of RIPA, and to report to Cabinet any concerns arising from those reports that may indicate that the use of RIPA is not consistent with the Policy or that the Policy may not be fit for purpose.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

The use of RIPA to conduct covert surveillance in appropriate instances supports many of the Council's enforcement and anti-fraud policies. The Home Office Code of Practice, which relevant bodies are obliged to follow when using RIPA, requires that elected Members should consider reports on the use of RIPA on at least a quarterly basis to ensure that it is being used consistently with the policy and the policy remains fit for purpose.

Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions

Reports will continue to be submitted to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

Report Implications

The following implications have been identified for this report.

Financial Implications

None.

Risk Management

There are no specific risk associated with this decision.

Equality and Diversity

None identified.

Climate Change and Carbon Impact

None identified.

Crime and Disorder

None identified.

Wards Affected

None directly.

Publicity Arrangements

Not applicable.

Consultations

Not applicable

Background Papers: None

Officer to contact: Karen Widdowson
Head of Democracy
Tel: 01509 634
karen.widdowson@charnwood.gov.uk

Part B

Background

1. RIPA provides for the authorisation of covert surveillance by the Council where that surveillance is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person.
2. Surveillance includes monitoring, observing or listening to persons, their movements, conversations or other activities and communications. Surveillance is covert if it is carried out in a manner calculated to ensure that any persons who are subject to the surveillance are unaware that it is or may be taking place.
3. The Council only has the power to authorise covert surveillance under RIPA for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime, or of preventing disorder. Since 2012, RIPA applications are required to be approved by a Justice of the Peace (JP) at the Magistrates' Court in addition to the existing application and authorisation process. The amendments in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 mean that local authority authorisations and notices under RIPA for the use of particular covert investigation techniques can only be given effect once an order approving the authorisation or notice has been granted by a JP.
4. At its meeting on 9th February 2023 Cabinet agreed to resolve that the Audit Committee continue to assume responsibility for receiving a quarterly report on the use of RIPA, and to report to Cabinet any concerns arising from those reports that may indicate that the use of RIPA is not consistent with the Policy or that the Policy may not be fit for purpose. This Committee will therefore continue to receive a regular report on the Council's use of RIPA powers.
5. The Council has commissioned RIPA training for key staff and is reviewing the custom and practices in the CCTV control room, and the relationship with the local Police, to ensure that good practice is being followed. Any recommendations arising from this exercise will be reported back to the Audit Committee within future reports.
6. The Committee has the option to report to Cabinet any concerns arising from RIPA monitoring reports that may indicate that the use of RIPA is not consistent with the Council's RIPA Policy or that the Policy may not be fit for purpose.