

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT
2000 (RIPA)
POLICY & PROCEDURES



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1 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This policy sets out how North Hertfordshire District Council will comply with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA), the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 and associated Codes of Practice when carrying out covert surveillance, using covert human intelligence sources (CHIS) or acquiring communications data.
- 1.2 This policy provides the framework for the lawful and responsible use of investigatory powers by the Council. The Council recognises that covert surveillance can interfere with an individual's right to respect for private and family life under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Council therefore expects the use of RIPA powers to be exceptional and a last resort. This policy applies to all Council services and to any third parties undertaking investigations on the Council's behalf. The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 replaced Part I of RIPA and now governs the interception of communications and the acquisition of communications data. Part II of RIPA continues to regulate the use of directed surveillance and covert human intelligence sources. Officers must seek advice from Legal Services before seeking to obtain communications data to ensure the correct legislative framework is applied.
- 1.3 The use of covert investigatory powers by the Council is expected to be rare and will only take place where it is lawful, necessary and proportionate and where less intrusive methods have been considered and found to be unsuitable.
- 1.4 This Policy is the framework on which the Council applies the provisions of The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) as it relates to covert surveillance. It incorporates the provisions of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSCA), which introduce updated powers for acquiring communications data and extracting electronic data. It must be read in conjunction with the statutory codes of practice issued by the Secretary of State and any additional guidance provided by Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) and individual Directorates to deal with the specific issues of their service.
- 1.5 The Council is required to adhere to the statutory codes of practice issued under RIPA and IPA, including those on covert surveillance, use of covert human intelligence sources (CHIS), and communications data acquisition. This policy also incorporates recent guidance issued by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO), particularly on the use of social media for surveillance and proportionality assessments when handling electronic data.

- 1.6 For the avoidance of doubt, all references to the Home Office Codes of Practice relate to the latest versions which were issued in relation to covert surveillance and covert human intelligence sources; and in relation to the acquisition and disclosure of Communications Data. References to the Code of Practice and other relevant Guidance document relate to the latest version which was issued¹ .
- 1.7 The Human Rights Act 1998 requires the Council to have respect for the private and family life of citizens. However, in rare cases, it may be lawful, necessary and proportionate for the Council to act covertly in ways that may interfere with an individual's rights.
- 1.8 The rights conferred by Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 are qualified, so it is still possible for a public authority to infringe those rights providing the following criteria are satisfied;
- 1.9 It is done in accordance with the law
- 1.10 **It is necessary:** Necessity means that in the particular circumstances of each enquiry there is no reasonably available overt method of obtaining the information that is being sought. This test will have to be applied to each case on its own merits but if there is a reasonable alternative to covert surveillance then the necessity test will probably not be satisfied.
- 1.11 **It is proportionate:** Judging proportionality will probably involve three considerations.
- Is the proposed method of surveillance excessive in relation to the seriousness of the matter that is being investigated? Is it proportional to the mischief under investigation?
 - Is there a reasonable available alternative method of investigation that would be less intrusive of privacy rights? i.e. It is the only option, other overt means having been considered and discounted.
 - Can collateral intrusion be avoided, and is the surveillance proportional to the degree of anticipated intrusion on the target and others? In addition to the subject there may be a possibility that the privacy rights of a third party may be infringed during surveillance.
- 1.12 It is possible that unauthorised surveillance will be a breach of a person's right to privacy under Article 8. Even if surveillance without due authorisation in a particular instance is not illegal, if authorisation is not obtained, the surveillance carried out will not have the protection that RIPA affords.

¹ Home Office – Communications Data Code of Practice 2018

- 1.13 If the correct procedures are not followed:
- The authorisation will not take effect as it will not be approved by the Magistrates Court if there are not reasonable grounds
 - Court proceedings that rely upon the information obtained by surveillance may be undermined
 - A complaint of maladministration may be made to the Ombudsman
 - The Council could be the subject of an adverse report by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office
 - A claim could be made leading to the payment of compensation by the Council
- 1.14 Through the application of authorisation procedures and Magistrates Court approval RIPA ensures that a balance is maintained between the public interest and the human rights of individuals.
- 1.15 RIPA does not;
- Make unlawful anything that is otherwise lawful
 - Impose any new statutory duties (N.B. but see paragraphs 1.5 –1.7 on the possible consequences of non compliance)
 - Prejudice or disapply any existing powers available to the Council to obtain information by any means not involving conduct that is governed by RIPA. (For example, it does not affect the Council's current powers to obtain information from the DVLA or the Land Registry).
- 1.16 If the RIPA procedures are followed correctly the conduct of an investigation will be deemed lawful for all purposes (section 27 RIPA). This protection extends to criminal and civil proceedings, and a complaint to either the Local Government Ombudsman or the Investigatory Powers Tribunal. It therefore provides protection both for the Council and any officer who may have been involved in an investigation.
- 1.17 It is important to note that the legislation does not only affect directly employed Council staff. Where external agencies are working for North Hertfordshire District Council, carrying out the Authority's statutory functions, the Authority remains liable for compliance with its duties. It is essential that all external agencies comply with the regulations, as they are contractually obliged to do so. Therefore, work carried out by agencies on the Council's behalf should be properly authorised by one of the Council's designated Authorising Officers and requires Magistrates Court approval for applications and renewals. Authorisation for surveillance should not be sought on behalf of another statutory or other organisation or agency. The advice of the Senior Responsible Officer ('SRO') should be sought in the event of uncertainty.
- 1.18 Applications to the Magistrates' Court for approval of an authorisation must be made in accordance with the requirements of the Court.

- 1.19 The use of the powers conferred by RIPA is subject to scrutiny by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office, which carries out periodic inspections of the Council's practices and procedures. Furthermore, RIPA also provides for the establishment of a Tribunal to determine complaints about the use of RIPA powers. It is therefore essential that surveillance is always carried out in compliance with RIPA, the policies and codes of practice referred to in this document and any advice or guidance that may be issued from time to time by the Director: Governance.
- 1.20 The Council is subject to inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO). The Council is committed to maintaining robust governance arrangements, accurate record keeping and effective oversight of all investigatory powers exercised under RIPA and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016.
- 1.21 The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) has overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with this policy, the relevant Codes of Practice and all statutory requirements. The SRO will ensure that any errors are reported to IPCO in accordance with the Codes of Practice and that periodic reports are provided to elected Members.
- 1.22 RIPA provides a means of authorising certain acts of covert surveillance for a variety of purposes. To fully understand the effects of RIPA, it is essential to understand the various types of activity that are covered, and those that are not permitted, and the purposes that will justify surveillance.
- 1.23 The provisions of RIPA that apply to Local Authorities provide a regulatory framework that permits;
- The use of Directed Surveillance (Part 3)
 - The use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Part 4)
 - The Acquisition and Disclosure of Communications Data (Part 5)

2 SURVEILLANCE

- 2.1 Local Authorities and the Police are permitted under RIPA to carry out covert directed surveillance and to use covert human intelligence sources the definitions for each being as follows;

- 2.2 “Surveillance” includes:
- Monitoring, observing, listening to persons, watching or following their movements, listening to their conversations or their other activities or communications;
 - Recording anything monitored, observed or listened to in the course of surveillance; and
 - Surveillance by, or with, the assistance of a surveillance device, which will include cameras, video, and listening or recording devices.

Surveillance can be either **overt** or **covert**.

2.3 Overt Surveillance

- 2.4 Most of the surveillance undertaken by the Council will be done overtly – there will be nothing secretive, clandestine or hidden about it. In many cases officers will be going about Council business openly (e.g. a routine inspection by an Environmental Health Officer) or will have notified the subject of the investigation that they are likely to be under surveillance. In the latter case officers need to be particularly alert to the possibility that the proposed surveillance may entail collateral intrusion into the lives and activities of persons other than the subject of the investigation (e.g. a visitor to premises). If there is the slightest possibility of collateral intrusion a RIPA authorisation should be obtained before any surveillance is carried out.
- 2.5 Surveillance will be overt if the subject has been told it will happen. This will be the case where a noisemaker is warned that recordings will be made if the noise continues; or where an entertainment licence is issued subject to conditions, and the licensee is told that officers may visit without notice or without identifying themselves to the owner/proprietor to check that the conditions are being met. Such warnings should be given to the person concerned in writing.
- 2.6 Overt surveillance does not require any authorisation under RIPA. Neither does low-level surveillance consisting of general observations in the course of law enforcement (for example, an officer visiting a site to check whether a criminal offence had been committed). Repeated visits may amount to systematic surveillance however, and require authorisation: if in doubt, advice should be sought from the RIPA Monitoring Officer or the Senior Responsible Officer.

2.7 Home Office guidance also suggests that the use of equipment such as binoculars or cameras, to reinforce normal sensory perception by enforcement officers as part of general observation does not need to be regulated by RIPA, if the systematic surveillance of an individual is not involved. However, if binoculars or cameras are used in relation to anything taking place on any residential premises, or in any private vehicle, the surveillance can be intrusive even if the use is only fleeting. Any such surveillance will be intrusive “if it consistently provides information of the same quality as might be expected to be obtained from a device actually present on the premises or in the vehicle”. The quality of the image obtained rather than the duration of the observation is what is determinative. It should be remembered that the council is not permitted to undertake intrusive surveillance.

2.8 Use of body worn cameras should be overt. Badges should be worn by officers stating body cameras are in use and it should be announced that recording is taking place. In addition, cameras should only be switched on when recording is necessary – for example, when issuing parking tickets.

2.9 Covert Surveillance

Covert surveillance is covert where it is ‘carried out in a manner **calculated** to ensure that the person or persons subject to the surveillance are unaware that it is or may be taking place’.

RIPA requires the authorisation of two types of covert surveillance (directed surveillance and intrusive surveillance) plus the use of covert human intelligence sources (CHIS) or acquisition of Communications Data.

2.10 Covert Human Intelligence Source (CHIS)

2.11 A person is a covert human intelligence source if that person ‘establishes or maintains a personal or other relationship with a person for the covert purpose of obtaining information or providing access to any information to another person, or they covertly disclose information obtained by the use of such a relationship’. Covert in this context means that it is calculated that the subject should be unaware of the purpose of the relationship.

2.12 A member of the public who volunteers information to the Council is not a covert human intelligence source.

2.13 The conduct or use of CHIS must be authorised in accordance with RIPA:

- **Conduct** of a CHIS: This is establishing or maintaining a personal or other relationship with a person for the covert purpose of (or is incidental to) obtaining or passing on information.
- **Use** of a CHIS: This includes inducing, asking or assisting a person to engage in the conduct of a source or to obtain information by means of the conduct of such a source.
- The use of a juvenile CHIS may only be authorised for four months at a time.

2.14 Members of the public who report allegations of anti social behaviour and are asked to keep a note of incidents will not normally be CHIS as they are not usually required to establish or maintain a covert relationship.

2.15 Noise

2.16 Persons who complain about excessive noise, and are asked to keep a noise diary, will not normally be a CHIS, as they are not required to establish or maintain a relationship for a covert purpose. Recording the level of noise (e.g. the decibel level) will not normally capture private information (if non-verbal noise such as music, machinery or an alarm), and therefore does not require authorisation. Recording sound with a DAT recorder or similar, could constitute covert surveillance, although if it can be heard from the street outside, may (as per the Code of Practice²) be regarded as having forfeited any claim to privacy. The easiest option is for this to be undertaken overtly – for example it will be possible to record sound if the noisemaker is warned that this will occur if the level of noise continues.

2.17 Test Purchases

Carrying out test purchases will not normally require the purchaser to establish a relationship with the supplier with the covert purpose of obtaining information, and therefore the purchaser will not normally be a CHIS. For example, authorisation would not normally be required for test purchases carried out in the ordinary course of business (e.g. walking into a shop and purchasing a product over the counter). By contrast, developing a relationship with a person in the shop, to obtain information about the seller's suppliers of an illegal product e.g. illegally imported wild meat, or using covert recording equipment is likely to require authorisation as a CHIS. Similarly, using hidden recording devices to record what is going on in the shop (e.g. a hidden CCTV Camera) may require authorisation as directed surveillance. A combined authorisation can be provided if a CHIS is carrying out directed surveillance.

2.18 Directed surveillance

Directed Surveillance is surveillance that is:

- covert but not intrusive surveillance; (see paragraph 3.2)
- undertaken for the purpose of a specific investigation or operation carried out in such a manner as is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person (whether one specifically identified for the purposes of the investigation or operation) and
- not carried out as an immediate response to events which would otherwise make seeking authorisation under RIPA unreasonable (e.g. spotting something suspicious and continuing to observe it).

2.18.1 Surveillance by way of an immediate response to events or circumstances where it would not be 'reasonably practicable' for an authorisation to be sought is not included within the provisions of RIPA.

2.19 Private Information

This phrase is defined in RIPA section 26(10) as including any information relating to a person's private or family life. The European Court of Human Rights has considered this definition and has found that private life is a broad term not susceptible to exhaustive definition. Aspects such as gender identification, name, sexual orientation and sexual life are important elements of the personal sphere protected by Article 8. The Article also protects a right to identity and personal development and the right to establish and develop relationships with other human beings and the outside world and it may include activities of a professional or business nature. There is therefore a zone of interaction of a person with others even in a public context, which may fall within the scope of "private life".

The fact that covert surveillance occurs in a public place or on business premises does not necessarily mean that it cannot result in the acquisition of private information about a person. Prolonged surveillance targeted on a single person will undoubtedly result in the obtaining of private information about them and others that they come into contact with or with whom they associate. Similarly, although the overt use of CCTV cameras does not normally require authorisation, if the camera is used for a particular purpose that involves the prolonged surveillance of a particular person, a RIPA authorisation will be required.

3 Exclusions

3.1 There are some instances where surveillance is not permissible in any circumstances:

3.2 Intrusive Surveillance

RIPA provides that the Council **cannot** authorise intrusive surveillance. This is covert surveillance carried out in relation to anything taking place on residential premises or in any private vehicle, whether by way of a person or device. It will also be intrusive surveillance where a device placed outside consistently provides information of the same or equivalent quality and detail, as might be expected if it were in the premises or vehicle

Residential premises are any part of premises occupied for residential purposes or living accommodation, including hotel rooms or prison cells. However, it does not include common areas in blocks of flats and similar premises.

Private vehicle is a vehicle used primarily for private purposes by the owner or person entitled to use it.

Only the police or other law enforcement agencies are permitted to employ intrusive surveillance. Likewise, the council has no statutory powers to interfere with private property.

3.3 Use of Children to gather information about parent/ guardian

Authorisation may not be granted for the conduct or use of a source under the age of sixteen where it is intended that the purpose is to obtain information about their parent or any person who has parental responsibility for them.

3.4 Vulnerable Individuals

A vulnerable individual is a person who is, or may be, in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation. Where it is known or suspected that an individual may be vulnerable they will only be authorised as a CHIS in the most exceptional of circumstances.

3.5 Use of Third Parties and Contractors

Where surveillance activity is undertaken by contractors or partner agencies on behalf of the Council, the Council remains legally responsible for ensuring compliance with RIPA.

Appropriate written agreements must be in place and RIPA authorisation must be obtained by the Council.

4 Grounds for Surveillance

- 4.1 Amendments to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 (“the 2010 Order”) mean that a local authority can now only grant an authorisation under RIPA for the use of Directed Surveillance where the local authority is investigating criminal offences which attract a custodial sentence of a maximum term of at least 6 months' imprisonment, or criminal offences relating to the underage sale of alcohol or tobacco under sections 146, 147 or 147A of the Licensing Act 2003 or section 7 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and as amended by subsequent legislation.
- 4.2 Even if the person granting the authorisation believes that the authorisation is necessary, they must also be satisfied that the authorised activity is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by it. This requires the Authorising Officer to balance the need for surveillance with the level of intrusion into any person's privacy.
- 4.3 Consideration should be given to collateral intrusion, which is interference with the privacy of persons other than the subject(s) of the surveillance. Such collateral intrusion or interference would be a matter of greater concern in cases where there are special sensitivities, for example in cases of premises used by lawyers or for any form of medical or professional counselling or therapy.

4.4 Confidential information

Careful consideration is also needed when there is a risk of obtaining confidential information.

The Covert Surveillance and Property Interference³ defines this as: “information held in confidence concerning an individual (whether living or dead) who can be identified from it, and the material in question relates to his or her physical or mental health or to spiritual counselling. Such information can include both oral and written communications. Such information as described above is held in confidence if it is held subject to an express or implied undertaking to hold it in confidence or it is subject to a restriction on disclosure or any legal obligation of confidentiality. For example, confidential personal information might include consultations between a health professional and a patient, or information from a patient's medical records”.

In cases where it is likely that confidential information will be acquired the authorisation must be granted by the Head of the Paid⁴ Service (or in their absence by an authorised Chief Officer).

- 4.5 An application for an authorisation must include a full assessment of the risk of any collateral intrusion or interference so that the Authorising Officer can consider this.

³ 2018 @ para 9.29.

⁴ Where any relevant legislation and or codes of practice refers to the Chief Executive, for interpretation purposes this is deemed to be the person who holds the role of Head of Paid Service or their Deputy.

- 4.6 Authorising Officers must always consider the need for surveillance or CHIS and balance this against an individual's right to privacy under the Human Rights Act 1998. An officer seeking an authorisation should always be able to justify why it is necessary and why other, less intrusive, forms of investigation are unsuitable or have previously been tried without success and thus the matter has escalated to the requirement for covert surveillance.

5 ACQUISITION AND DISCLOSURE OF COMMUNICATIONS DATA

The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 and as amended by the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024 ('IPA') provides the statutory framework for the lawful acquisition of Communications Data. Local authority applications must be submitted via the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) and approved by the Office for Communications Data Authorisations (OCDA) in accordance with the Act.

- 5.1 Public Authorities can only apply if this is for 'the applicable crime purpose'. This means the data has to be wholly or partly Events data, the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime; or in any other case, the purpose of preventing or detecting crime or of preventing disorder.
- 5.2 The types of Communications Data that Local Authorities' can access are Entity and Events Data, which are defined as:

Entity Data: means any data which is about:

- (ii) an association between a telecommunications service and an entity, or
- (iii) an association between any part of a telecommunication system and an entity, and
- (iii) consists of or includes data which identifies or describes the entity (whether or not by reference to the entity's location) and is not events data.

Events Data: any data which identifies or describes an event (whether or not by reference to its location) on, in or by means of a telecommunication system where the event consists of one or more entities engaging in a specific activity at a specific time. Where the purpose of the acquisition is to prevent or detect crime, and the data required is events data, the offence or conduct of the offence being investigated must meet at least one of the definitions of serious crime⁵.

⁵ Section 86(2A) of the Act this means: an offence for which an adult is capable of being sentenced to one year or more in prison; any offence involving violence, resulting in substantial financial gain or involving conduct by a large group of persons in pursuit of a common goal; any offence committed by a body corporate; any offence which involves the sending of a communication or a breach of privacy; or an offence which involves, as an integral part of it, or the sending of a communication or breach of a person's privacy

- 5.3 The IPA has also removed the necessity for local authorities to seek Magistrates or Justice of the Peace approval to acquire Communications Data. Under the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, applications for communications data must be made to the Office for Communications Data Authorisations (OCDA) via the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN), who will consider the application prior to submitting this for approval to the OCDA. All applications must be approved before Communications Data is acquired. The Investigatory Powers Commissioner oversees the use of the powers (who with Judicial Commissioners have a role to approve authorisations to identify or confirm the identity of a journalist's source). The application process has otherwise been made more efficient through the ability to submit these electronically⁶.
- 5.4 Sections 37 to 44 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022 (PCSCA) came into force on 8 November 2022. This provides public authorities with a further power to extract data held on electronic devices. It empowers public authorities to extract data from electronic devices where one of the following conditions is met:
- Preventing or detecting serious crime.
 - Locating a missing person.
 - Protecting a child or vulnerable adult from harm.
- 5.5 Before extracting electronic data, there must be:
- a reasonable belief that information stored on the device will be relevant to the investigative purpose,
 - Ensure the extraction of the information is necessary and proportionate to achieve the objective,
 - Comply with the statutory Code of Practice under the PCSCA, ensuring that risks to privacy are minimised.
- 5.6 As indicated in 5.5 above, the three scenarios provided under s37(2) are for the purpose of:
- (a) preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting crime;
 - (b) helping to locate a missing person; or
 - (c) protecting a child or an at-risk adult from neglect or physical, mental or emotional harm.
- 5.7 To ensure any extraction of stored communication under s.37 remains lawful, it is essential that the criteria and procedures set out within the PCSCA and the association Code of Practice are fulfilled.
- 5.8 Failure to follow statutory procedures may result in unlawful acquisition of communications data and may expose the Council and individual officers to criminal liability under the Investigatory Powers Act 2016.

⁶ See local authority procedures set out in paragraphs 8.1 to 8.7 of the Communications Data Code of Practice.

6 PROCEDURE TO OBTAIN A RIPA AUTHORISATION

6.1 Directed surveillance, the use of CHIS must be lawfully carried out in strict accordance with the terms of the relevant authorisation and Magistrates Court approval.

6.2 The Council will only very occasionally make use of CHIS so the applicant officer should consult the Senior Responsible Officer before making an application for a CHIS authorisation in order to ensure that the current statutory requirements and best practice are being observed.

6.3 Applications for Communications Data is as indicated above via NAFN.

6.4 All applications for authorisation must be sought and granted *before* any surveillance activity takes place. The decision whether or not to authorise an application must not be taken with the benefit of hindsight. This should be borne in mind when submitting an application to the Magistrates' Court under Paragraph 7 below.

6.5 Making the Application

- Before making an application for an authorisation the requesting officer must;
- read this policy document
- determine whether the activity that they are proposing to conduct involves directed surveillance or the use of a CHIS
- assess whether the activity will be in accordance with the law – is it governed by RIPA
- assess whether the activity is necessary and why
- assess whether the activity is proportionate.

If the activity could be conducted overtly or if a less intrusive option is available and practical use that option in preference to a RIPA authorisation.

6.6 The application form once completed by the applicant officer, must be submitted to an Authorising Officer, together with a health and safety risk assessment that should cover any potential risks to Council officers, or third parties, including members of the public.

6.7 The persons entitled to grant authorisations are designated in the Schedule of Authorising Officers, which is kept by the Senior Responsible Officer and is accessible on the Council's Intranet

6.8 The Authorising Officer should note:

- the date and time of grant or refusal;
- the reasons for that decision;
- the exact date on which the authorisation will be reviewed.

- 6.9 An application must describe:
- any conduct to be authorised;
 - the purpose of the investigation and how long the situation has existed;
 - why it is necessary;
 - why it is proportionate;
 - the intended subjects, if known;
 - the intended product that the surveillance will provide;
 - any potential collateral intrusion and the justification for this;
 - details of any confidential information that may be obtained;

6.10 The Application Forms

- 6.10.1 The Home Office has published standard forms for the use by local authorities. These have been adopted by the Council and can be accessed through the Intranet under *Corporate – Forms - RIPA*. Every box in the application form must be completed or marked n/a where it is not appropriate.
- 6.10.2 Each operation/ investigation must be allocated a unique reference number (URN). This will be the next number in sequence taken from the Central RIPA Log, as identified by the Authorising Officer and should be entered on the form.

7. MAGISTRATES' COURT APPROVAL

- 7.1 All RIPA authorisations (other than Communications Data) will require Magistrates' Court approval in the form of an order to take effect. The court must be satisfied that reasonable grounds exist in relation to the authorisation. The Home Office issued guidance to all Magistrates' Courts in England and Wales for a local authority application seeking an order approving the grant or renewal of a RIPA authorisation or notice⁷.
- 7.2 Legal Services must be consulted on the form and content of the application to the Magistrates' Court for approval. The types of offences for which RIPA authorisation can be obtained by the Council are outlined under section 4 above.

8 DURATION OF AUTHORISATIONS

- 8.1 It is no longer possible for urgent authorisations to be given orally. However, a Magistrate may consider an authorisation out of hours in exceptional circumstances.
- 8.2 Directed surveillance authorisations will cease to have effect (unless renewed) at the end of a period of three months beginning with the day on which it took effect.

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118174/magistrates-courts-eng-wales.pdf

- 8.3 Three months' is deemed for the purpose of this guidance to mean three calendar months/twelve weeks from the date of approval by the magistrate.
- 8.4 Authorisations for the conduct or the use of covert human intelligence sources will last for up to 12 months, beginning with the day on which the grant or renewal takes effect.
- 8.5 Authorisations relating to Communications Data last 1 month.

8.6 **Review**

- 8.6.1 The Authorising Officer must review Directed Surveillance authorisations frequently, at least monthly. The frequency of mid term reviews should be risk assessed based on the nature of the operation. If this is a CHIS authorisation, then ordinarily this would be every 3-4 months. CHIS authorisations must be reviewed at intervals determined by risk assessment and in accordance with the relevant Code of Practice.
- 8.6.2 RIPA application forms must be reviewed on or before the expiry date of the authorisation which will be the date stated in the application form. When a RIPA authorisation is reviewed the appropriate form should be completed and record:
- the date and time of that review
 - confirmation as to whether the surveillance is to continue or not
 - the reasons for that decision
- 8.6.3 Authorisations must be reviewed regularly and cancelled when no longer necessary. Records of reviews and outcomes must be maintained.

8.7 **Renewal**

- 8.8 If at any time before an authorisation would cease to have effect, it is necessary for the authorisation to continue for the purpose for which it was given, it may be renewed in writing for a further period of 3 calendar months, beginning with the day when the original authorisation would have expired. Magistrates Court approval is required before a renewal takes effect.
- 8.9 The Authorising Officer must consider the matter afresh, including taking into account the benefits of the surveillance to date and any collateral intrusion that has occurred.
- 8.10 Authorisations may be renewed more than once, provided they continue to meet the criteria for authorisation and are approved by the Magistrates' Court.
- 8.11 Prior to renewal of an authorisation for the use or conduct of a covert human intelligence source, there must be a full review of the use made of that source, the tasks given to that source and the information so obtained.

8.12 Cancellation

- 8.13 The Authorising Officer must cancel an authorisation if they become satisfied that the surveillance is no longer required or appropriate.
- 8.14 Authorisations should not be allowed simply to lapse. The matter should be referred to an Authorising Officer via the same process as for the initial application and a form of cancellation must be completed:
- if the necessary evidence has been obtained; or
 - it is decided at any time that the surveillance is unlikely to produce the evidence sought, then.
- 8.15 The Authorising Officer must then cancel the Application without delay. When cancelling the authorisation, the Authorising Officer is required to consider whether the surveillance was effective, necessary and met its objectives. Cancellations must be made using the cancellation form and should briefly detail what product(s) resulted from the surveillance.
- 8.16 When cancelling an authorisation, the Authorising Officer must ascertain what recorded material has been obtained using directed surveillance. The Authorising Officer should comment on the recorded material and how it is to be managed or used thereafter. If the matter is not proceeding to a prosecution, the Authorising Officer must be satisfied that any recorded material has been securely destroyed.

9 AUTHORISING OFFICERS

- 9.1 Authorisations may only be given by the Authorising Officers listed in Appendix B. Only the Head of Paid Service can authorise the use of a CHIS, or the acquisition of confidential information.
- 9.2 Applications for the acquisition of Communications Data can only be issued by a Home Office accredited single point of contact (SPoC). The Council has two SPoCs, Director: Customers and the Investigations Manager.
- 9.3 NAFN provides a SPoC service to local authorities. Local authorities using the NAFN SPoC service will still be responsible for scrutinising the application for Communications Data prior to contacting NAFN.
- 9.4 **Determining an Application**
- i. The applicant officer must complete the application form in its entirety.
 - ii. Authorisation under RIPA is quite separate from delegated authority to act under the Council's Scheme of Delegation. **RIPA authorisations are for specific investigations only and must be cancelled or renewed once the specific surveillance is complete, or about to expire.**
 - iii. The Authorising Officer should not just "sign off" an authorisation, they must give **personal consideration** to the necessity and proportionality of the proposed

action prior to applying to the Magistrates Court for approval and must personally ensure that the surveillance is reviewed and cancelled.

Any rejected applications must be entered into the RIPA log held by the Director: Governance.

9.5 In the case of applications for authority to carry out **directed surveillance** the Authorising Officer should:

- consider the relevant Codes of Practice
- consider whether the specific operation or investigation has been adequately described
- be satisfied as to the reasons for the application⁸ (see 4.1 for grounds).
- be satisfied that the directed surveillance is **necessary** in the circumstances of the particular case.
- be satisfied that the surveillance is **proportionate** to the stated purpose and objectives
- be satisfied that the possibility of collateral intrusion has been avoided or minimised
- consider the likelihood of confidential information being acquired
- check that an appropriate review period has been listed on the application form.

If there is an alternative practicable means of carrying out the surveillance, which is less intrusive, then the surveillance is neither necessary nor proportionate and should not be authorised. The least intrusive method should be used

Additional Factors when Authorising a CHIS

In addition, when authorising the conduct or use of a CHIS the Authorising Officer must

- be satisfied that the **conduct** and/or **use** of the CHIS is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved.
- be satisfied that **appropriate arrangements** are in place for the management and oversight of the CHIS.
- consider the likely degree of intrusion of all those potentially effected.
- consider any adverse impact on community confidence that may result from the use or conduct, or the information obtained.
- ensure **records** contain statutory particulars and are not available except on a need to know basis.

⁸ S.I. 2010/521, see article 7A

- ensure that authorisations relating to the use of a juvenile CHIS are only for four months at a time.
- be satisfied that a full risk assessment has been undertaken.

9.6 The role of Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) is undertaken by the Director: Governance. The role of RIPA Co-ordinating Officer is undertaken by the Service Director's PA.

The SRO is responsible for:

- the integrity of the process in place within the public authority for the management of CHIS and Directed Surveillance;
- compliance with Part 2 of the Act and with the Codes;
- oversight of the reporting of errors to the relevant oversight Commissioner and the identification of both the cause(s) of errors and the implementation of processes to minimise repetition of errors;
- engagement with the IPCO inspectors when they conduct their inspections, where applicable; and
- where necessary, oversight of the implementation of post-inspection action plans approved by the relevant oversight Commissioner.

9.7 The role of CHIS Handler will be allocated to either one of the Director: Place, Director: Customers, or Director: Regulatory, depending which directorate is using the CHIS. The CHIS Controller will be allocated to one of the other two heads of service by the Head of Paid Service.

The CHIS Handler is responsible for:

- dealing with the CHIS on behalf of the Council;
- directing the day to day activities of the CHIS;
- recording the information supplied by the CHIS; and
- monitoring the CHIS's security and welfare.

The CHIS Controller is responsible for management and supervision of the CHIS Handler, and general oversight of the use of CHIS.

10 WORKING WITH / THROUGH OTHER AGENCIES

- 10.1 The Council may work in conjunction with other public authorities and enforcement bodies, for example, the Police, the Department for Work and Pensions or HM Revenue and Customs. Where the Council participates in a joint operation, it must satisfy itself that appropriate authorisation is in place. The Council must obtain and retain a copy of any partner agency authorisation and ensure that the activity falls within its scope. If another agency chooses to rely on a RIPA authorisation from this Council the Authorising Officer must be made aware.
- 10.2 A copy of another agency's authorisation should be obtained, and copies kept in the same manner as an authorisation granted by the Council. Officers should also ensure that review and renewal dates are noted and that copies of the appropriate forms are also obtained and kept appropriately.
- 10.3 In the event that a member of staff has concerns that an authorisation, Magistrates' Court approval, review, or renewal completed by a partner agency does not comply with the law, codes of practice, or agreed arrangements for surveillance, they should refer the matter to an Authorising Officer of the Council for further action as necessary.
- 10.4 When another agency (e.g. the Police, Inland Revenue etc), wish to use the Council's premises or facilities (other than CCTV) for their own RIPA action, officers should normally co-operate unless there are good operational or management reasons as to why the Council's facilities should not be used for the agency's activities. Suitable insurance or other indemnities may be sought from the agency in return for the Council's co-operation. In such cases the Council's RIPA forms should not be used if it is merely assisting and is not actually involved in the RIPA activity.

11 RECORD MANAGEMENT

- 11.1 The Council must keep a detailed record of all authorisations, Magistrates' Court approvals, reviews, renewals, and cancellations. Copies of all authorisations, Magistrates' Court approvals, records of oral authorisations, reviews, renewals, cancellations and refusals must be kept in a central register held by an Authorised Officer. In addition, all original authorisations, records of oral authorisations, Magistrates' Court approvals, reviews, renewals, cancellations, refusals and other relevant documents must be sent to the RIPA Co-ordinating Officer, who maintains the central RIPA log (record of authorisations and rejections).
- 11.2 All information obtained during directed surveillance should be recorded in a surveillance log. This should be in a format that gives an accurate and suitably detailed account of the events observed and conversations heard at particular times.
- 11.3 Copies of all authorisations, records of oral authorisations, Magistrates' Court approvals, reviews, renewals, cancellations and refusals should be kept for a period of 6 years after the conclusion of any Court proceedings arising for which the surveillance or use of the CHIS was relevant. If it is believed that the records could be relevant to pending or future criminal proceedings, the officer in charge of the investigation shall confirm that they should be retained for a suitable further period, subject to any subsequent review. The Council shall retain records for a minimum period of six years from the date of cancellation of the authorisation, or longer where required for legal proceedings or statutory purposes.. This decision must be notified to the Director: Governance.

12 Records maintained in the Directorates and Centrally

- 12.1 Generally, all material (in whatever media) produced or obtained during the course of investigations subject to RIPA authorisation (whether authorised or not), should be processed, stored and destroyed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and any other legal requirements, including those of confidentiality and the Council's policies and procedures regarding document retention. The following paragraphs give guidance on some specific situations, but advice should be sought from the Director: Governance, or the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Officer where appropriate. All documents must be retained securely, and electronic copies of documents must be password protected.
- 12.2 Copies of the following documents must be retained securely in the departments. Original documents must be sent to the Senior Responsible Officer within 5 working days. They should be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "Confidential RIPA forms".
- The application and the authorisation together with any supplementary documentation and notification of the approval given by the Authorising Officer;
 - The application to the Magistrates' Court and any relevant approval/court order;
 - A record of the period over which the surveillance has taken place;
 - The frequency of reviews prescribed by the Authorising Officer;
 - A record of the result of each review of the authorisation;
 - Any renewal of an authorisation, together with the supporting documentation submitted when the renewal was requested and Magistrates' Court approval;
 - The date and time when any instruction was given by the Authorising Officer.
 - An electronic log is maintained centrally on a restricted public folder within G/drive. The Log is kept in a password-protected Excel spreadsheet, located in drive G/RIPA 2000/ RIPA Log. Only Authorising Officers can view it.
 - The Council shall retain records for a period of at least 6 years from the ending of the authorisation. The Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) can review the Council's policies and procedures and individual authorisations. The IPCO usually provide notice before an inspection but can arrive unannounced.

Copies of authorisations, renewals and cancellations are discoverable in legal proceedings. If proper records are not maintained, evidence gathered may be inadmissible.

12.3 Records Relating to the CHIS:

- 12.3.1 All information obtained by the CHIS and by the officer responsible for recording the use of the CHIS should be recorded by means of a daily log. This should be in a format that gives an accurate and suitably detailed account of the events observed and conversations heard at particular times.
- 12.3.2 All information recorded in respect of authorisations, surveillance or the use of CHIS must only be disclosed for the purposes for which it was gathered at the time or for use in any future civil or criminal proceedings brought by or against the Council.
- 12.3.3 Records which reveal the name(s) of the CHIS should only be disclosed to persons to the extent that there is a need for access to them; if legally necessary; or if ordered by any Court.
- 12.3.4 When it is intended to employ a CHIS a record must be kept that records all the detail specified in Appendix 2. The officer in charge of maintaining a record of the use of each CHIS should record all these details. The way these records are kept is designed to try to keep the CHIS safe from discovery by the subjects and safe from any harm which could result from their disclosure and also to keep in the open any money or other benefits paid to a CHIS who is not an employee officer of an authorising body.

13 RECORDED MATERIAL OBTAINED DURING INVESTIGATIONS

- 13.1 Where recorded material (in any form or media) is obtained during the course of an investigation which might be relevant to that investigation, or another investigation, or to pending or future civil or criminal proceedings, then it should not be destroyed, but retained in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and any other legal requirements, including those of confidentiality, and the Council's policies and procedures regarding document retention. Advice should be sought from the Senior Responsible Officer or the Information and Records Manager.
- 13.2 Where recorded material is obtained, which is not related to a criminal or other investigation or to any person who is the subject of the investigation, and there is no reason to suspect that it will be relevant to any future civil or criminal proceedings, it should be destroyed immediately.
- 13.3 Recorded Material obtained in the course of an investigation may be used in connection with investigations other than the one that the relevant authorisation was issued for. However, the use or disclosure of such material outside the Council, unless directed by any court order, should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and in accordance with advice from the Senior Responsible Officer.
- 13.4 Where recorded material obtained is of a confidential nature, then the following additional precautions should be taken:
- Confidential recorded material should not be retained or copied unless it is necessary for a specified purpose;
 - Confidential recorded material should only be disseminated in accordance with legal advice that it is necessary to do so for a specific purpose;
 - Confidential recorded material which is retained should be marked with a warning of its confidential nature. Safeguards should be put in place to ensure that such recorded material does not come into the possession of any person where to do so might prejudice the outcome of any civil or criminal proceedings;
 - Confidential recorded material should be destroyed as soon possible after it is used for the specified purpose.
 - Confidential recorded material should be made available for the IPCO at the time of any Inspection.
- 13.5 If there is any doubt as to whether material is of a confidential nature, advice should be sought from the Senior Responsible Officer.
- 13.6 The Authorising Officer must ascertain what material has been obtained by the use of directed surveillance. The Authorising Officer should comment on the material and how it is to be managed or used thereafter. If the matter is not proceeding to a prosecution, the Authorising Officer must be satisfied that any material has been securely destroyed.

- 13.7 All surveillance activity must comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. Information must be securely stored and retained only for as long as necessary and in accordance with the Council's retention policies.

14 SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

- 14.1 The use of the internet and social media for investigative purposes must be conducted lawfully and in accordance with this policy.

Viewing information that is openly available to the public will not normally require RIPA authorisation. However, RIPA authorisation may be required where officers:

- undertake repeated monitoring of an individual
- create false or misleading online identities
- join closed or private online groups
- interact covertly with individuals online

Officers must seek advice from the RIPA Monitoring Officer before undertaking any covert online activity.

- 14.2 Where privacy settings are available but not applied the data available on Social Networking Sites may be considered 'open source' and an authorisation is not usually required.
- 14.3 Repeat viewing of 'open source' sites, however, may constitute directed surveillance on a case by case basis and this should be borne in mind e.g. if someone is being monitored through, for example, their Facebook profile for a period of time and a record of the information is kept for later analysis, this is likely to require a RIPA authorisation for directed surveillance.
- 14.4 To avoid the potential for inadvertent or inappropriate use of social network sites in investigative and enforcement roles, Council Officers should be mindful of any relevant guidance and the Council's separate policy regarding the use of Social Networking Sites: Conduct of Investigations.
- 14.5 Officers must have regard to the latest version of the Covert Surveillance and Property Interference Code of Practice and any guidance issued by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office relating to online covert activity.

- 14.6 Officers must consider the privacy implications of using social media for investigations. While initial reconnaissance on open profiles may not engage RIPA, systematic monitoring or repeated collection of data will likely require a Directed Surveillance authorisation.
- 14.7 Officers must adhere to the IPCO Code of Practice (2023) on online covert activity, including:
- Avoiding persistent monitoring unless authorisation is obtained.
 - Documenting the necessity and proportionality of using online platforms.
 - Taking additional precautions when engaging with private accounts or restricted content.
- 14.8 Use of covert human intelligence sources (CHIS) in online platforms must be pre-authorised in line with RIPA and IPA requirements.

15 TRAINING

- 15.1 Training on RIPA and the procedures set out in this policy document will be given or authorised by the Director: Governance. Any officer who wishes to undertake surveillance or employ a CHIS and all Authorising Officers must receive and maintain suitable training before signing any RIPA authorisations.
- 15.2 A Central Register of all officers who have received training on RIPA will be maintained by the Service Director: Governance.
- 15.3 As part of the periodic review of this Policy and Procedures the Senior Responsible Officer will determine any ongoing training needs both for Authorising Officers and applicant officers. Refresher courses will be held as necessary.
- 15.4 The responsibility for ensuring that staff receive appropriate training in connection with RIPA lies with Service Directors.
- 15.5 The purpose of the training will be to ensure that both applicant and Authorising Officers are not only familiar with the law governing RIPA regulated activities, but also receive practical advice on the making and consideration of applications. In particular the training will be aimed at familiarising officers with the evidence that is needed to show that a covert operation is necessary, proportionate and likely to be conducted in a manner that will minimise collateral intrusion.
- 15.6 The training will also emphasise the need for Authorising Officers to state clearly the nature of the covert activity that they are authorising and the parameters of that activity i.e. what, where, when, how and against whom.
- 15.7 The importance of setting and observing review, cancellations and renewal dates will form part of the training.

- 15.8 The Senior Responsible Officer will invite pertinent officers to a biannual forum to discuss RIPA and issues relating to enforcement. The forum should aim to benchmark best practice.

16. ELECTED MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

- 16.1 Two new Codes of Practice came into effect on 6 April 2010:

- Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Covert Human Intelligence Source: Code of Practice) Order 2010
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Covert Surveillance and Property Interference: Code of Practice) Order 2010

- 16.2 The Codes of Practice state that elected members should:

- Set the RIPA policy at least once a year
- Review the local authority's use of RIPA
- Consider internal reports on the use of RIPA on at least a quarterly basis

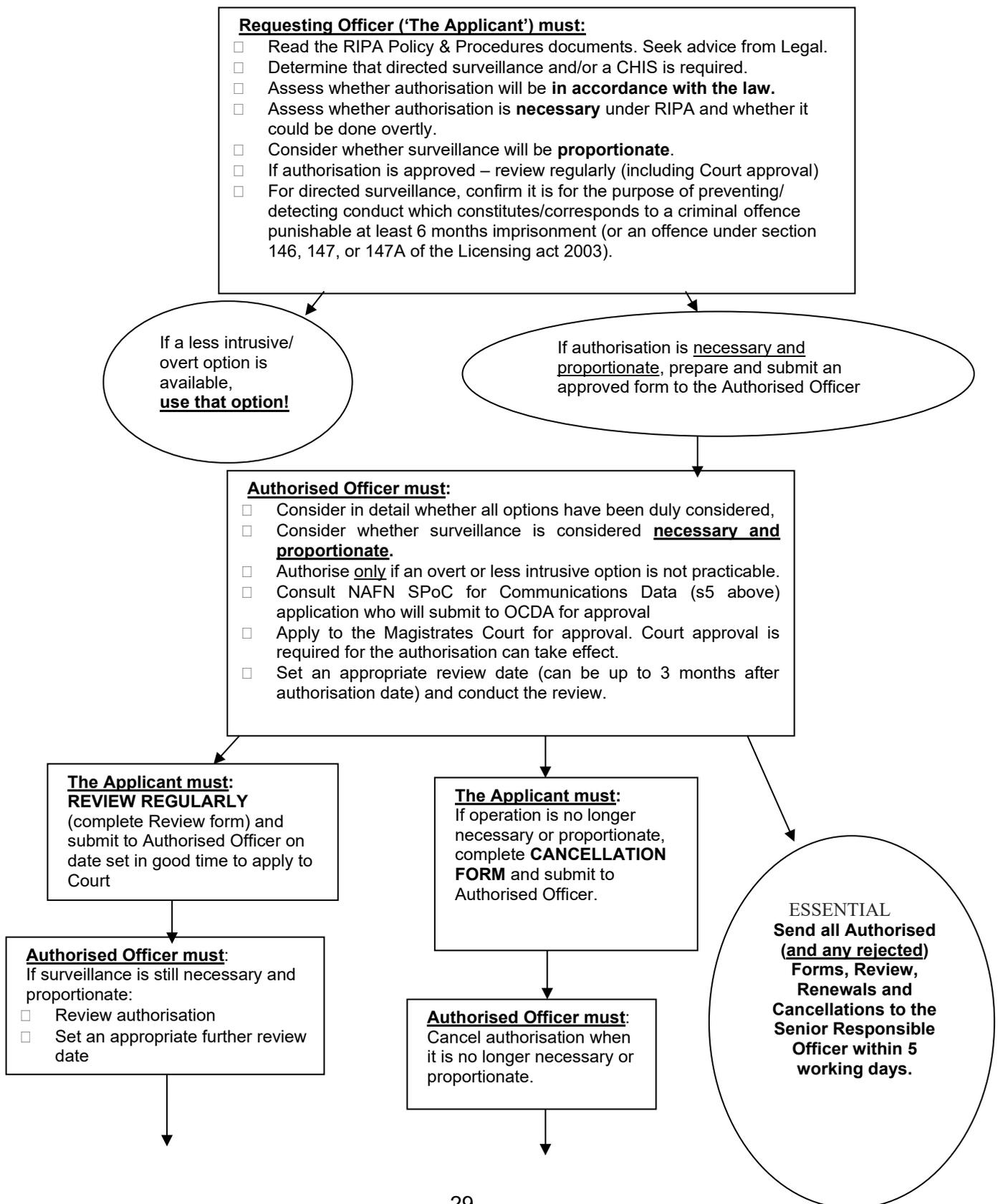
- 16.3 The Terms of Reference for Cabinet in the Council's Constitution state that Cabinet is:

"To prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council."

The setting of the RIPA policy annually is therefore a role for Cabinet. The Partnerships Scrutiny Sub Committee will consider the Policy annually and make recommendations to Cabinet.

- 16.4 The requirement for members to review the local authority's use of RIPA and consider internal reports on the use of RIPA on at least a quarterly basis is to be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the terms of reference for that Committee contained in the Council's constitution.

APPENDIX A
FLOW CHART OF RIPA PROCESS



- Send all Quarterly Returns to the Service Director: Governance PA.
- The Codes of Practice state that elected members should:
 - Set the RIPA policy at least once a year
 - Review the local authority's use of RIPA
 - Consider internal reports on the use of RIPA on at least a quarterly basis (these are covered by in a Member Information Note or other appropriate notification).

APPENDIX B

AUTHORISING OFFICERS AND RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS

RIPA Authorising Officers	Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), or in their absence someone acting as a Deputy. Director: Customers Director: Regulatory Director: Environment Director: Place
Authorising operations where confidential information may be obtained	Head of Paid Service only
CHIS Authorising Officer	Head of Paid Service only
CHIS Controller/Handler	Director: Environment Director: Customers Director: Place
Senior Responsible Officer	Director: Governance and Monitoring Officer
RIPA Co-ordinating Officer	PA to Director: Governance

Please note:

- Where use of a CHIS is authorised, the head of the directorate carrying out the activity shall usually act as the CHIS Handler, with the CHIS Controller role being allocated by the Head of Paid Service.
- Authorising Officers must be “an assistant chief officer or investigations manager” or above.
- The Authorising Officers should not be directly involved in the investigation.