



Chelmsford City Council Governance Committee

15 October 2025

Senior Responsible Officer's report in relation to the Council's RIPA arrangements

Report by:

Senior Responsible Officer

Officer Contact:

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Purpose

To update members on the Council's RIPA arrangements.

Recommendations

1. To note the annual update for members.
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1. Background

- 1.1. RIPA relates to covert investigatory powers given to local authorities for specific and limited purposes. For local authorities such as Chelmsford City Council only three types of activity may be authorised and this includes directed surveillance, the use of covert human intelligence source and the acquisition of communications data. These powers are overseen by the Investigatory Powers Commissioners Office (IPCO) who undertakes periodic RIPA inspections.

Details of how these types of activity could be authorised by the Council are set out in detail in two policies – the RIPA policy and the RIPA social media policy.

- 1.2. In terms of number of authorisations granted, as has been the case for some years, the Council has not needed to obtain any RIPA approvals during the past year. The Council's RIPA register does however note a directed surveillance recently authorised by another agency. In any event the Council needs to make sure that it remains ready to do so if necessary and that staff are properly trained to ensure investigations continue to be undertaken in a lawful and appropriate way. Ongoing annual reviews of RIPA arrangements are undertaken to support this and provide assurance.
- 1.3. Inspections by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) usually take place every few years. An inspection was undertaken in 2023 by way of a written response being provided to the inspectors for consideration. The inspectors were satisfied with the Council's arrangements and the response provided. The next inspection is due 3 years after the last inspection.

2. Annual Review 2025

- 2.1 Both the Council's RIPA and RIPA Social Media Policies were reviewed in some detail during the inspection in 2020. Further technical updating was subsequently necessary because of legislative changes under the CHIS (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021 and a new CHIS Code of Practice. Personnel updates have also been made because of staff changes. The policy and appointment updates are made as necessary by the SRO under officer delegation.
- 2.2 Training of key personnel was completed in house in 2023, and refresher training is being planned for winter 2025/6. RIPA policies together with training needs continue to be reviewed at least annually together with any ongoing actions through the RIPA officer working group. The officer working group has recently met and have agreed to develop an unmanned aerial vehicle policy (commonly referred to as a "drone") for the planning enforcement team. An audit was undertaken to look at RIPA compliance and this made recommendations. Most of the actions have already been completed and the final recommendation is due to be completed shortly. Part of the annual review process also involves providing an assurance report to the Governance Committee, usually in the autumn.

List of appendices:

Nil

Background papers:

Nil

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: These are set out in the RIPA policies referred to in the report. This report is provided to committee for assurance purposes as to the steps taken to ensure compliance and reduce risk of undertaking covert surveillance without appropriate consideration and authorisation.

Financial: None

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None

Personnel: None

Risk Management: See legal and constitutional paragraph above.

Equality and Diversity: None

Health and Safety: None

Digital: None

Other: None

Consultees: none

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

Current RIPA and RIPA social media policies
