Chelmsford City Council Governance Committee

18 November 2026

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

Report by:
Senior Responsible Officer

Officer Contact:
Lorraine Browne, Monitoring Officer, lorraine.browne@chelmsford.gov.uk, tel - 01245 - 606560

Purpose
To update members concerning the arrangements for covert surveillance.

Recommendations
That the Committee notes the report.

Summary of Key Points
This is a routine annual report to provide assurance to members as to the appropriateness and readiness of the Council's RIPA arrangements.

1. Introduction

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. 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 3 years. An inspection was undertaken earlier this year 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.

2. Annual review 2026

2.1. Both the Council's RIPA and RIPA Social Media Policies were reviewed in some detail during an 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 personnel updates are made as necessary by the SRO under officer delegation.

2.2. Training of key personnel was completed in house in early 2026. RIPA policies together with training needs continue to be reviewed at least annually together with any ongoing actions through the RIPA officer working group. An unmanned aerial vehicle policy (commonly referred to as a "drone") has now been approved and as at the time of writing the report will shortly go live. An audit was undertaken to look at RIPA compliance and this made recommendations. All the actions have now been completed. Part of the annual review process also involves providing an assurance report to the Governance Committee, usually in the autumn.

2.3. The officer working group meets at least annually to review the current arrangements and met in the Autumn prior to this report being provided.

3. Conclusion

3.1. There are no concerns to report in relation to the Council's current arrangements which remain fit for purpose.

List of appendices:

None

Background papers:

RIPA and RIPA Social Media Policies

Corporate Implications

Corporate Implication	Response
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 para above
Equality and Diversity	No EIA necessary.
Health and Safety	None
Digital	None
Other	None

Consultees:

RIPA working group

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

RIPA and RIPA Social Media Policies