

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Annual Report on the Use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)

Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet
Portfolio Holder(s)	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance
Lead Director	Lee Colyer, Director of Finance & Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer)
Head of Service	Patricia Narebor, Head of Legal Partnership
Lead Officer/Report Author	Keith Trowell, Team Leader (Corporate Governance)
Classification	Non-exempt
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to the final decision-maker:

That the report be noted

This report relates to the following Five Year Plan Key Objectives:

- A Confident Borough

The Report contributes to providing value to our community by demonstrating that we are open, transparent and accountable.

Timetable (* please delete those not applicable)

Meeting	Date
Management Board	21 May 2020
Cabinet	25 June 2020

Annual Report on the Use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA).

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This annual report provides details of the use of covert surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
 - 1.2 The report will be published on the Council's website.
-

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) was enacted in 2000 to regulate the manner in which certain public bodies may conduct surveillance and access a person's electronic communications and to ensure that the relevant investigatory powers are used in accordance with human rights. RIPA has been amended and repealed in part by the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. The provisions of RIPA that remain in force and have not been significantly amended include:
 - directed and intrusive surveillance (on residential premises/in private vehicles);
 - covert surveillance in the course of specific operations;
 - the use of covert human intelligence sources (agents, informants, undercover officers); and
 - access to encrypted data.
- 2.2 The revised Code of Practice for Covert Surveillance and Property Interference published by the Home Office in December 2014 states that as a general rule elected members of an authority should review the authority's use of RIPA and set the policy at least once a year.
- 2.3 The Council very rarely makes use of its RIPA powers and would only do so in circumstances where the use is proportionate. No RIPA applications have been made or authorised since March 2011. The last authorisation related to a benefit fraud investigation that resulted in evidence leading to a conviction being passed to the Department for Work and Pensions. There have been no authorisations requested since then.
- 2.4 Prior to 2011, most authorisations were used to obtain evidence to support allegations of benefit fraud. Local RIPA authorisations (i.e. from the Council) no longer need to be sought for benefit investigations as evidence-gathering activities are now co-ordinated through a single national gateway (the National Anti-Fraud Network, or NAFN) therefore the total number of RIPA authorisations across all local authorities is significantly reduced.

- 2.5 There is also increased awareness of the scope of RIPA and of the alternatives to covert surveillance as a result of training delivered to all investigating and authorising officers in recent years.
- 2.6 The Chief Executive is the person responsible for RIPA. He acts as the Senior Responsible Officer referred to in Part 3 of the revised Code of Practice. The Monitoring Officer maintains a register of authorisations applied for and granted and the Council's systems and procedures are overseen by the Head of Audit Partnership.
- 2.7 The Council continues to receive regular inspections from the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO). The most recent inspection was early in 2018 with the Inspector's Report being issued on 31 January 2018. The Council takes account of the OSC's conclusions and recommendations when formulating and revising RIPA practice and policy. The RIPA policy was updated in April 2018 and is currently under review. Following this review required refresher training will be arranged for all officers involved in the oversight of RIPA and those involved applications and authorisations.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 This is an annual report for Cabinet's information, in compliance with the Code of Practice for Covert Surveillance and Property Interference published by the Home Office.

4. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 4.1 The report is for noting only.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 If the report is approved it will be published on the Council's website

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off (name of officer and date)
Legal including Human Rights Act	This report meets the requirement to produce an annual report on the use of RIPA powers. The	Keith Trowell 14.05.20.

	use of RIPA powers can result in a direct interference with a person's human rights. The Council must comply with its procedures and any authorisations must be proportionate in order to justify such interference.	
Finance and other resources	It is necessary that a sufficient budget is available for RIPA training. There are no value for money considerations arising from this report other than to ensure that the Council is acting according to best practice.	Jane Fineman 21.05.20.
Staffing establishment	No implications	Keith Trowell 14.05.20.
Risk management	There are some risks associated with RIPA, most notably reputational risks arising from possible adverse media coverage however, use of RIPA is now minimal and the Council can minimise the risk by ensuring that the use of RIPA is proportionate and appropriate.	Keith Trowell 14.05.20.
Data Protection	There are no specific privacy or data protection issues to address.	Keith Trowell 14.05.20.
Environment and sustainability	The appropriate and proportionate use of investigatory powers assists with the effective investigation of envirocrimes, including incidents fly tipping.	Gary Stevenson 21.05.20.
Community safety	The appropriate use of RIPA can assist in the prevention and detection of crime in the Borough thereby demonstrating compliance with the duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.	Terry Hughes 14.05.20.
Health and Safety	No implications.	Mike Catling 15.05.20.
Health and wellbeing	No implications	Gary Stevenson 21.05.20.
Equalities	The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.	Sarah Lavallie 18.05.20.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.