



Code of Practice on Covert Surveillance

A guide to the Council's approach to
the Regulation of Investigatory
Powers Act 2000.

October 2015

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CODE OF PRACTICE ON COVERT SURVEILLANCE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Council enforces the law in a number of areas. As part of this enforcement there will be occasions where surveillance of individuals or property is necessary to ensure that the law is being complied with. When the Council does decide to undertake surveillance it is important that it remains within the law which is contained in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (“the Act”) as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

The GOV website provides an overview of the Act and procedures:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism/regulation-investigatory-powers/>

The Act sets out certain criteria that the Council has to comply with before it undertakes surveillance and those are also reflected in the Office of Surveillance Commissioners' Procedures and Guidance in relation to covert surveillance by public authorities (“the Code”). This is available on the Home Office website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covert-surveillance-and-covert-human-intelligence-sources-codes-of-practice>

The Home Office has also issued guidance (“the Guidance”) on the judicial approval process for RIPA and the crime threshold for directed surveillance. This is available on the Home Office website:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/ripa-forms/local-authority-ripa-guidance/local-authority-england-wales?view=Binary>

Officers will need to familiarise yourself with the contents of the Code and the Guidance.

Other guidance is available on the Office of Surveillance Commissioners website:

www.surveillancecommissioners.gov.uk

The Council will comply with the Code when carrying out directed surveillance and officers should be aware of its provisions. Failure to observe the provisions of the Act may result in the protection of the Act not being available. This may mean that the evidence gathered:

- *is not admissible in court proceedings.*
- *is a breach of an individual's human rights.*

This policy sets out how Colchester Borough Council (including Colchester Borough Homes) will comply with the Act, the Code and the Guidance. It also clarifies the circumstances in which officers will be able to use covert surveillance and the internal requirements that will need to be observed when conducting that surveillance.

The Policy Statement should be read in conjunction with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

The Policy Statement will be made available for inspection at Council offices.

2.0 WHAT DOES THE ACT AND THE CODE COVER?

The Act and the Code cover covert surveillance, which is defined in the Act as being surveillance which “*is carried out in manner calculated to ensure that the persons subject to the surveillance are unaware that it is or may be taking place*”.

2.1 Directed surveillance

Local authorities can only use a form of covert surveillance called “directed surveillance”. This is defined in the Act as where the surveillance is covert but not intrusive and is undertaken:

- For the purposes of a specific investigation or operation
- In such a manner as is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person (whether or not specifically identified for the purposes of the investigation) and
- Otherwise than by way of an immediate response to events or circumstances the nature of which is such that it would not be reasonably practicable for an authorisation under the Act to be sought

“Private Information” in relation to a person includes any information relating to their private or family life.

Surveillance is not covert if notification has been sent to the intended subject of the surveillance. For example, in a noise nuisance case a letter notifying a subject that the noise will be monitored by officers visiting will make the surveillance overt. However as a matter of good practice surveillance should be considered covert if the notification to the subject is over 3 months old. All communications of this nature should be sent by Registered Post or delivered by hand.

2.2 General observations

General observations by officers in the course of their duties are not covered by the Act

Directed surveillance will not include surveillance that is undertaken as an immediate response to events or circumstances which, by their nature could not have been foreseen. This will include situations where officers are out in the normal course of their duties and happen to witness an activity, for example a housing officer visiting tenants and witnessing anti social behaviour by an individual. *In other words, where there is no systematic surveillance.*

If there is any doubt as to whether a RIPA authorisation is required you should seek advice from the Council's Legal Services.

2.3 Intrusive surveillance

“Intrusive Surveillance” is surveillance that is;

- Carried out in relation to anything taking place on any residential premises or in any private vehicle; and
- Involves the presence of an individual on the premises or in the vehicle or is carried out by means of a surveillance device.

Intrusive Surveillance cannot be authorised by local authority officers and all officers are strictly prohibited from engaging in Intrusive Surveillance

2.4 Covert Human Intelligence Sources

The Council is also permitted to use Covert Human Intelligence Sources under the Act. A Covert Human Intelligence Source is someone who establishes or maintains a personal or other relationship for the covert purpose of helping the covert use of the relationship to obtain information. However at the current time the Council does not consider this necessary and will not use Covert Human Intelligence Sources.

All officers are strictly prohibited from using Covert Human Intelligence Sources.

3.0 AREAS OF OPERATION

The Council has examined its functions and considers that the following areas may use directed surveillance from time to time. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list but covers areas where directed surveillance may be necessary in the course of the Council’s business.

- Neighbour nuisance and anti social behaviour
- Protection of Council property
- Licensing enforcement
- Fraud against the Council(including benefit fraud)
- Misuse of Council property, facilities and services
- Enforcement of the planning regime
- Environmental monitoring and control
- Food Safety enforcement.
- CCTV, but more on this later (see 7.2)

However this is subject to the crime threshold referred to at 5.0 below.

4.0 AUTHORISATION AND AUTHORISING OFFICERS

If directed surveillance is proposed to be carried out then **authorisation must be sought**. Under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2003 as amended by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence

Sources) (Amendment) Order 2015, the Council considers that the following officers can authorise directed surveillance (these officers are either Chief Officers, Assistant Chief Officers, Assistant Heads of Service, Service Managers or officers in charge of investigations) (“Authorising Officer”);

Chief Executive

Executive Directors

Assistant Chief Executive Corporate and Financial Management

Head of Commercial Services

Head of Community Services

Head of Customer Services

Head of Operational Services

Head of Professional Services

Any case involving Confidential Information must be authorised by the Chief Executive.

An Authorising Officer when being requested to authorise directed surveillance must be satisfied that the request is necessary and meets the criteria set down in the Act, the Code and the Guidance. An Authorising Officer must not authorise directed surveillance connected with an investigation in which they are directly involved.

Any application to extend or cancel surveillance must also be approved by an Authorising officer.

Once any application is approved by the Authorising Officer it must be referred to Legal Services who will make an application for approval by a Magistrate.

No directed surveillance may be undertaken by the Council without the prior approval of a Magistrate.

5.0 CRIME THRESHOLD

The Guidance states that the Council:

- **can** only grant an authorisation under RIPA for the use of directed surveillance where it is investigating criminal offences which attract a maximum custodial sentence of six months or more or criminal offences relating to the underage sale of alcohol or tobacco.
- **cannot** authorise directed surveillance for the purpose of preventing disorder unless this involves a criminal offence(s) punishable (whether on summary conviction or indictment) by a maximum term of at least 6 months' imprisonment.
- **can** authorise use of directed surveillance in more serious cases as long as the other tests are met – i.e. that it is necessary and proportionate and where prior approval from a Magistrate has been granted. Examples of cases where the offence being investigated attracts a maximum custodial sentence of six months or more could include more serious criminal damage, dangerous waste dumping and serious or serial benefit fraud.

- **can** authorise the use of directed surveillance for the purpose of preventing or detecting specified criminal offences relating to the underage sale of alcohol and tobacco where the necessity and proportionality test is met and prior approval from a Magistrate has been granted.
- **cannot** authorise the use of directed surveillance under RIPA to investigate disorder that does not involve criminal offences or to investigate low-level offences which include, for example, littering, dog control and fly-posting.

6.0 GROUNDS FOR GRANTING AN AUTHORISATION

An authorisation for directed surveillance may only be granted if the Authorising Officer believes that authorisation is necessary:

- **for the purposes of preventing or detecting crime or of preventing disorder and it meets the crime threshold mentioned in 5.0 above.**

AND the Authorising Officer must also be satisfied and believe that the surveillance is proportionate to what it seeks to achieve.

The Code advises that following elements of proportionality should be fully considered:

- balancing the size and scope of the proposed activity against the gravity and extent of the perceived mischief;
- explaining how and why the methods to be adopted will cause the least possible intrusion on the target and others;
- that the activity is an appropriate use of the legislation and the only reasonable way, having considered all others, of obtaining the necessary result; and
- providing evidence of other methods considered and why they were not implemented.

Covert surveillance will only be used for one of the legitimate purposes where sufficient evidence exists to justify the surveillance and the surveillance is the least harmful method of meeting that purpose. The surveillance itself must be a proportionate response to the issue it is seeking to address. Consideration should be given to alternative methods of resolving the situation or obtaining the evidence sought and this should be documented.

Particular attention should be paid to the effect of the surveillance on the privacy of other persons ("collateral intrusion"). Measures should be taken to avoid or minimise intrusion. Any collateral intrusion should be taken into account when an Authorising Officer is assessing proportionality.

7.0 PROCEDURE FOR AUTHORISATIONS, CANCELLATIONS AND RENEWALS

7.1 Authorisations

An authorisation must be granted by those persons authorised at 4 above. No other person is permitted to authorise directed surveillance.

Authorisations must be in writing on the form attached.

Authorisation cannot be given to operations after they have commenced. Failure to obtain correct authorisation may mean that evidence is not admissible in legal proceedings and may breach a subject's human rights.

The authorisation form must be kept on the relevant case papers and held securely. A copy of the authorisation must be passed to Legal Services to be held on a central file and monitored for consistency of approach of Authorising Officers and validity.

An authorisation 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.

7.2 Magistrates Approval

Once an authorisation form has been completed Legal Services will:

- contact the Magistrates Court to arrange for a hearing
- supply the court with a partially completed judicial application/ order form
- supply the court with a copy of the authorisation and any supporting documents setting out the Council's case
- the hearing will be in private and be heard by a single justice of the peace.
- The justice of the peace may decide to either:
 - (i) approve the grant (or renewal) of an authorisation; or
 - (ii) refuse to approve the grant (or renewal) of an authorisation

7.3 Review

Officers should, as a matter of good practice review authorisations on a regular basis during the course of that surveillance to ensure that the authorisation still meets the criteria. If it does not the authorisation should be cancelled using the procedure described below. A review form is attached. Officers in charge of investigations will be required to keep a record of these reviews and will submit a record of that review (normally by email) to the Monitoring Officer to be held centrally.

7.4 Renewals

A renewal of an authorisation can be made at any time before it expires and must be done on the form attached. The original should be kept on the case file and a copy passed to the Monitoring Officer for retention centrally. When considering whether to grant a renewal of an authorisation the Authorising Officer will consider the same factors outlined at 5 above. All renewals must be subject of an application to the Magistrates Court in line with the procedure at 7.2 above.

7.5 Cancellations

The Authorising Officer who last granted or renewed the authorisation must cancel it if s/he is satisfied that the directed surveillance no longer meets the criteria for authorisation. A cancellation should be made on the form attached. The original should be retained on the case file and a copy passed to Legal Services for retention centrally.

Authorisations, renewals and cancellations are subject to monitoring on an annual basis by the Monitoring Officer as to validity under the Act and the Code.

7.6 Audit

At the end of each calendar year each of the Authorising Officers referred to at 4 must provide the Monitoring Officer with a list of all directed surveillance authorised by them throughout that year or provide written and signed confirmation that no such surveillance has been authorised by them

8.0 MISCELLANEOUS POINTS

8.1 Material obtained from covert surveillance ("product")

Material produced as a result of covert surveillance will be secured and transported securely. Where the product obtained is to be used in criminal proceedings the Council must comply with the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. In all other cases the treatment of product must follow Council's guidelines on access, retention and storage as set out in the Data Protection Policy.

8.2 CCTV

The Act and the Code will not usually apply to use of an overt CCTV system because the public are aware that the system is in use. However there are circumstances where the system is used for the purposes of a *specific operation or investigation* and in these circumstances an authorisation will be required. If the police assume operational control of the system an authorisation complying with their own procedures must be supplied to the Council. Further information in respect of these procedures can be found in the Council's CCTV Code of Practice, which has been produced in conjunction with Essex Police.

9.0 TRAINING

The Council will endeavour to ensure that the Officers who are authorising directed surveillance are appropriately trained.

All Authorising Officers and those routinely engaged in directed surveillance have been provided with this guidance, have access to the Code and the standard forms.

This Code of Practice and the standard forms are available in electronic format on the Hub under One Council/ Corporate Governance/ Code of practice of covert surveillance.

10.0 GENERAL BEST PRACTICES

The following guidelines are considered as best working practices by all public authorities with regard to all applications for authorisations covered by the Code:

- applications should avoid any repetition of information;
- information contained in applications should be limited to that required by the relevant legislation;
- an application should not require the sanction of any person in the Council other than the Authorising Officer;
- where it is foreseen that other agencies will be involved in carrying out the surveillance, these agencies should be detailed in the application;
- authorisations should not generally be sought for activities already authorised following an application by the same or a different public authority.

11.0 SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

The Council's nominated Senior Responsible Officer in accordance with the Code is Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer who will be responsible for:

- the integrity of the process in place within the Council to authorise directed surveillance;
- compliance with Part II of the Act, the Code and the Guidance;
- engagement with the Office of the Surveillance Commissioners and inspectors when they conduct their inspections, and where necessary, overseeing the implementation of any post inspection action plans recommended or approved by a Commissioner.
- that all authorising officers are of an appropriate standard in light of any recommendations in the inspection reports prepared by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioners.

12.0 COMPLAINTS

The Act, the Code and the Guidance are subject to monitoring by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioners. Any complaints regarding use of surveillance powers should be dealt with initially through the Council's Complaints and Compliments Procedure. If this does not result in a satisfactory outcome for the complainant then they should be referred to:

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal
PO Box 33220
London SW1V 9QZ
Tel: 0207 035 3711
Website : www.ipt-uk.com

13.0 QUERIES ABOUT THIS CODE OF PRACTICE

Any queries regarding this Code of Practice should be referred to the Monitoring Officer, Andrew Weavers on ☎ 2213 or by email at andrew.weavers@colchester.gov.uk