

16 June 2023



**Report on the Council's use of powers
under the Regulation of Investigatory
Powers Act 2000 - Quarter 4 - 2022/23**

Report of Helen Lynch, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform members about the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ('RIPA') during the period 01 January 2023 and 31 March 2023 (quarter 4) to ensure that it is being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

Executive summary

2. This report provides an update of the activity for quarter 4 of 2022/23 for Durham County Council in exercising its use of powers under RIPA for Directed Surveillance (DS) and Covert Human Intelligence Surveillance (CHIS).
3. The Council's Senior Responsible Officer is satisfied that the Council's use of its powers under RIPA during quarter 4 is consistent with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Members:
 - i. Receive the quarterly report on the Council's use of RIPA for the period covering quarter 4 2022/23.
 - ii. Resolve that the powers are being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

Background

5. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) enables local authorities to carry out certain types of surveillance activity provided that specified procedures are followed.
6. Directed surveillance is covert surveillance that is not intrusive and is carried out in relation to a specific investigation or operation in such a manner as is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about any person (other than by way of an immediate response to events or circumstances such that it is not reasonably practicable to seek authorisation under the 2000 Act).
7. The Local Authority is able to rely upon the information obtained from those surveillance activities within court proceedings.
8. This report gives details of RIPA applications that have been authorised during the quarter 4.

Quarter 4 Activity

- 9 During quarter 4 there was one application for directed surveillance and one CHIS application presented to the Court.
- 10 The directed surveillance was part of an operation relating to underage sales of alcohol and tobacco. The surveillance authorisation covered a total of 36 premises, of which 24 were inspected during the authorisation period.
- 11 Out of the 24 premises inspected as part of the operation, a total of 10 premises had made underage sales of tobacco, of which 9 of the 10 premises had sold vapes/ e-cigs and one premises had sold cigarettes.
- 12 Officers have since visited the premises of those who made the underage sales during the operation and advice and guidance has been given to them. Officers are also in the process of interviewing the owners and/or sellers to assess the circumstances of the underage sales and to determine whether further action is required, which could range from a formal caution to a licence review of those premises which are licensed.
- 13 The CHIS application is an operation relating to illicit tobacco products. The investigation is ongoing and the outcome will be reported at a future meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.
- 14 For comparison, in quarter 4 in 2021/22, there were no applications for RIPA directed surveillance and no CHIS applications.

Background papers

- None.

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Appendix 1 - Implications

Legal Implications

The Council's objective is to make lawful and appropriate use of surveillance techniques where required whilst complying with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998, in particular the provisions of Article 8 of the ECHR securing respect for an individual's (qualified) right to privacy. Quarterly oversight by the board helps secure this objective.

Finance

Not applicable.

Consultation

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable.

Climate Change

Not applicable.

Human Rights

Use of investigatory powers potentially engages the Human Rights Act 1998 and in particular the qualified right to private and family life under article 8 of the European Convention. This right may only be interfered with in circumstances where it is necessary and proportionate to do so in pursuit of the public interest. Oversight by the Board of the Council's RIPA operations is designed to facilitate compliance with the Human Rights Act.

Crime and Disorder

The appropriate use of an oversight of RIPA powers will enable the Council to provide evidence to support appropriate prosecutions and tackle crime.

Staffing

Not applicable.

Accommodation

Not applicable.

Risk

An individual may complain to Investigatory Powers Tribunal that surveillance has been unlawful and if found to be unlawful could result in financial penalties and reputational damage.

Procurement

Not applicable.