

**WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**POLICY**  
**ON THE ACQUISITION OF COMMUNICATIONS DATA,**  
**AND USE OF COVERT SURVEILLANCE**  
**AND COVERT HUMAN INTELLIGENCE SOURCES**  
*(REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000)*

**Statement**

Officers and employees of (and contractors working on behalf of) Wokingham Borough Council may, in the course of their investigatory, regulatory and enforcement duties, need to make observations of persons in a covert manner, to use a Covert Human Intelligence Source or to acquire Communications Data. These techniques may be needed whether the subject of the investigation is a member of the public, the owner of a business or a Council employee.

By its very nature, this sort of action is potentially intrusive and so it is extremely important that there is a very strict control on what is appropriate and that, where such action is needed, it is properly regulated in order to comply with Legislation and to protect the individual's rights of privacy.

Privacy is a right, but in any democratic society, it is not an absolute right. The right to a private and family life, as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, must be balanced with the right of other citizens to live safely and freely, which is the most basic function that every citizen looks to the state to perform.

Drawing on the principles set out in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998, this policy sets out the Royal Borough's approach to Covert Surveillance, the use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources and the acquisition of Communications Data.

The policy also sets out Members' oversight of this area, adopts a set of procedures and appoints appropriate officers to ensure that these areas are properly controlled and regulated.

### Policy

- 1.1 It is the policy of Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) that all Covert Surveillance, the use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources (informants) and the acquisition of Communications Data by those working for or on behalf of this Council (investigators) will be carried out in accordance with this policy and the associated procedure (the RIPA Procedure). Any member, officer or employee who deliberately or recklessly breaches this policy will normally be considered to have committed an act of gross misconduct and will be dealt with accordingly.
- 1.2 In so far as the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) allows, Covert Surveillance and the use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources (informants) will always be subject to the RIPA application process. (This does NOT affect monitoring activities where the actions undertaken do not amount to covert surveillance.) Where officers wish to undertake covert surveillance or use informants but where RIPA is not available, a similar process of considering the proportionality and necessity of any such activities must be carried out before the activities are undertaken and approval gained from a RIPA authorising officer.
- 1.3 When acquiring Communications Data officers are instructed to use the RIPA process, as amended by the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, unless they are doing so with the consent of the data subject. Communications data may only be obtained using RIPA powers for the purposes of investigating a criminal offence.

### Appointments

- 1.4 The Council appoints the Chief Executive as the *Senior Authorising Officer (SAO)* and *Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)* for all purposes under RIPA.
- 1.5 The Council appoints the Assistant Director, Governance as the *RIPA Monitoring Officer (RMO)* to monitor the use of covert techniques within this Council (whether using the RIPA or non-RIPA processes) and reports to members on the activities the policy covers. They are also directed to ensure that appropriate training is made available to *Authorising Officers (AOs)* and applicants when it is required.
- 1.6 The Council directs that only those appointed by this policy as AOs may authorise covert surveillance, the use of informants or the acquisition of communications data.
- 1.7 The Council appoints Directors and Assistant Directors to meet the training criteria. In addition, there are identified officers trained as AOs, subject to a maximum number of six (including the SAO). The Council instructs the RMO to maintain a list of all those currently authorised as part of the RIPA Procedures.
- 1.8 The Council directs the SAO to appoint such persons as he may from time to time see fit to be *Single Points of Contact (SPOC)* (or to make such other arrangements as he deems appropriate) for the purposes of acquiring communications data by the use of RIPA.
- 1.9 In order for the Council's RIPA authorisations to take effect, they must be approved by a Magistrate. The chief legal officer is instructed to authorise all those who may need to apply to a Magistrate to appear for that purpose for the Council. The RMO is directed to maintain a list, as part of the RIPA Procedures, of all those so authorised.

### Oversight and Reporting

- 1.10 The RMO shall report to elected Members on the use of RIPA regulated activity by officers of the Council every six months. Such a report shall be presented to the Members (or to such a sub-committee as the full council shall deem appropriate to constitute for oversight purposes) by the RMO and the SRO. The report **must not** contain any information that identifies specific persons or operations but must be clear about the nature of the operations carried out and the product obtained.
- 1.11 Alongside this report, the RMO and SRO will report details of 'Non-RIPA' surveillance in precisely the same fashion.
- 1.12 Elected Members shall have oversight of the Council's policy and shall review that policy annually should it be deemed by the RMO that significant changes have been made.. At that review (or following any six-monthly report) elected Members shall make such amendments as they deem necessary to the Council's policy, and may give such directions as they deem necessary to the RMO and SRO in order to ensure that the Council's policy is followed.
- 1.13 Elected Members shall not interfere in individual authorisations. Their function is to, with reference to the reports, satisfy themselves that the Council's policy is robust and that it is being followed by all officers involved in this area. **Although it is elected members who are accountable to the public for council actions, it is essential that there should be no possibility of political interference in law enforcement operations.**

### RIPA Procedures

- 1.14 The RMO is instructed to create a set of procedures that provide instruction and guidance for the use of surveillance and informants, and the acquisition of communications data. They are further instructed to maintain and update the RIPA Procedures, ensuring that they continue to be both lawful and examples of best practice.
- 1.15 The reference to 'maintain and update' in this section includes the duty to remove AOs from the list if they cease to be employed in a relevant role or if they no longer satisfy the requirements to be an AO, and the right to add names to that list so long as (a) they satisfy the policy and regulatory requirements and (b) at no time does the number of AOs exceed six.
- 1.16 If a change is required, in the opinion of the RMO, in order to comply with this part, they are authorised to make that change without prior approval from any person.
- 1.17 The RMO must report any changes made under this section to Members when they undertake their annual oversight of the Policy, as set out above.
- 1.18 All managers are required to ensure that their staff understand that covert investigation techniques may only be used in accordance with this policy and the associated procedures.

### Training

- 1.19 In accordance with this Code of Practice, AOs **must** receive full training in the use of their powers. They must be assessed at the end of the training, to ensure competence, and must undertake refresher training at least every two years. Training will be arranged by the RMO. Designated AOs who do not meet the required standard, or who exceed the training intervals, are prohibited from authorising applications until they have met the requirements of this paragraph. AOs must have an awareness of appropriate investigative techniques, Data Protection and Human Rights Legislation.

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### Policy on the Acquisition of Communications Data, and the use of Covert Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources

- 1.20 Those officers who actually carry out surveillance work must be adequately trained prior to any surveillance being undertaken. A corporate training programme will be developed to ensure that AOs and staff undertaking relevant investigations are fully aware of the legislative framework.
- 1.21 Senior management who have no direct involvement with covert investigation will undertake a briefing at least biannually, to ensure that they have a good understanding of the activities that might fall into the definition of covert investigation techniques.

#### **Exceptions, Notes and Complaints**

- 1.22 CCTV cameras operated by this Council are NOT covered by this policy, unless they are used in a way that constitutes covert surveillance; only under those circumstances must the provisions of this policy and the RIPA Procedures be followed.
- 1.23 Interception of communications, if it is done as part of normal business practice, does NOT fall into the definition of acquisition of communications data. (This includes, but is not limited to opening of post for distribution, logging of telephone calls, for the purpose of cost allocation, reimbursement, benchmarking, etc.; logging E Mails and internet access for the purpose of private reimbursement.)
- 1.24 If any person wishes to make a complaint about anything to which this policy applies is invited to use the Council's Complaints Procedure. Any complaint received will be treated as serious and investigated in line with this Council's policy on complaints. **Regardless of this, the detail of an operation, or indeed its existence, must never be admitted to as part of a complaint. This does not mean it will not be investigated, just that the result of any investigation would be entirely confidential and not disclosed to the complainant.**

#### **Adoption and Amendment of the Policy**

- 1.25 This version of the Policy was agreed prior to its adoption being recommended to Council via the Constitution Review Group on 7 February 2018 after which it came into immediate effect. It replaces all previous policies on these subjects.