



- 1.2. This means, for example, a right not to be watched, have your mail opened or have your personal space invaded including by a public authority. Accordingly, a local authority is required to respect the private and family life of each citizen, their homes and correspondence. However, this right is qualified such that it can be interfered with where it is necessary and proportionate and carried out in accordance with the law. If these requirements are not met and an investigation undertaken that interfered with these rights then it would be unlawful interference.
- 1.3 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) is one such law that permits interference – it details ways in which public bodies can lawfully carry out investigations when there is a wish to use surveillance techniques. For local authorities these comprise:
- Directed surveillance (covert surveillance of individuals outside of residential premises and vehicles);
  - Covert human intelligence sources (CHIS) (such as the deployment of undercover officers); and
  - The acquisition and disclosure of communications data (such as telephone billing information or subscriber details)
- 1.4 Where a local authority carries out overt investigation (e.g. enforcement officers on patrol, signposted CCTV cameras in normal use) then this does not fall within the scope of RIPA. Equally, obtaining information that is not private information about an individual but which is obtained without someone's immediate knowledge is in most cases not caught (e.g. including recording noise levels from outside a property where the occupier has been warned this will happen if the noise continues or Food Safety or Health and Safety inspections).
- 1.5 The general guiding principle is that if surveillance is overt, or is not obtaining private information it does not need to follow RIPA requirements. Where there is directed surveillance or use of a covert human intelligence source then the requirements of RIPA must be followed.
- 1.6 Following criticism of local authorities' use of covert surveillance powers additional safeguards were put in place including:
- The need to obtain magistrate approval
  - Only be used to investigate offences which attract sentences of six months or more or relate to the underage sale of alcohol or tobacco.
- 1.7 The Council's RIPA Policy as currently published is attached as Appendix 1. As it provides and as is appropriate, the Council's policy is to not use these covert surveillance powers save where absolutely necessary and the procedure is set out for what should be done where it is felt that it is necessary, including requiring the authority of named Authorised Officers.

- 1.8 Adopting this practice has not been to the detriment of carrying out the Council's functions and the Council has not used these powers of surveillance since 2014, providing an annual nil return to the IPCO, which requests statistics of how these powers are being used by public authorities across the country.

## **2.0 The Council and RIPA in the last 12 months**

- 2.1 The Council has not used its RIPA surveillance powers in the last 12 months. The last time such powers were used dates back to 2014.
- 2.2 In August 2024, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) conducted its 3 year review/inspection of the Council. The inspector appointed by the IPCO conducted a "remote" inspection. This was reported to the Community, People and Equalities PDG in December 2024, where it was recommended no amendments to the policy.
- 2.3 The RIPA policy is attached at Appendix 1. This was last approved at the February 2025 Cabinet meeting.
- 2.4 On 24 February 2025, the Council arranged RIPA training for officers, and in particular for front-line practitioners. The training was provided by an experienced external trainer in RIPA and was well attended. The training included social media surveillance, and this has been cascaded down to their teams. Training is appropriate to avoid inadvertently carrying out directed or other form of covert surveillance in breach of the Procedures in place.

**Financial Implications:** None directly arising from this report.

**Legal Implications:** The use of RIPA powers is heavily regulated and scrutinised by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office ("IPCO"). The legislation, combined with Codes of Conduct, sets the framework for the use of RIPA powers. Statutory guidance requires the Council to review the use of RIPA and the RIPA policy annually.

**Risk Assessment:** There are no risks directly arising from this report. The Council has the necessary policy and procedures in place with appropriate training have been given to officers.

**Impact on Climate Change:** None.

**Equalities Impact Assessment:** None directly arising from this report, but human rights, including equalities matters, are central to RIPA.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** None.

### **Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks**

**Statutory Officer:** Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

**Date:** 28.10.25

**Statutory Officer:** Maria de Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

**Date:** 23 October 2025

**Chief Officer:** Stephen Walford

Agreed by Chief Executive

**Date:** 28.10.25

**Performance and risk:** Stephen Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

**Date:** 24 October 2025

**Cabinet member notified:** Yes

### **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

Maria de Leburne, Director of Legal, People & Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Email: mdeleburne@middevon.gov.uk

**Background papers:**

None