

Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 (RIPSA) Policy

Version No 2.3

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Information Governance Steering Group
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 (RIPSA) places a requirement on public authorities to authorise certain types of covert surveillance (i.e. the subject of the surveillance is unaware that it is taking place) during planned investigations.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The Council's RIPSA Policy and associated procedures allow for the appropriate authorisation of requests for covert surveillance to be considered/approved/refused and monitored through to completion.

1.3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

There are no strategic implications arising from this Policy.

1.4 LINKS TO LEGISLATION

This Policy considers relevant legislation and regulatory requirements including the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 (RIPSA) and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016.

1.5 LINKS TO CORPORATE GROUPS

This Policy is linked to the work of the Corporate Management Team and the Information Governance Steering Group.

2 SCOPE

This Policy applies to all covert surveillance activities within Inverclyde Council and employees must adhere to the authorisation framework specified in this Policy and associated procedures.

3 POLICY CONTENT

3.1 Introduction

The use of surveillance to provide information is a valuable resource for the protection of the public and the maintenance of law and order. In order that local authorities and law enforcement agencies are able to discharge their responsibilities, use is made of unaided surveillance and surveillance devices. Where this surveillance is covert i.e. the subject of the surveillance is unaware that it is taking place, then it must be authorised to ensure that it is lawful.

CCTV systems in the main will not be subject to this policy as they are "overt" forms of surveillance. However, where CCTV is used as part of a pre-planned operation of covert surveillance, then authorisation should be obtained.

The use of human beings to provide information ("informants") is a valuable resource for the protection of the public and the maintenance of law and order. In order that local authorities and law enforcement agencies are able to discharge their responsibilities, use is sometimes made of "undercover" officers and informants. These will be referred to in this document as "covert human intelligence sources" ("CHIS") and the area of work of undercover officers and informants to whom this procedure applies will be referred to as "CHIS work".

Until October 2000 the use of covert surveillance and covert human intelligence sources was not subject to statutory control in the UK. From that date a legal framework ensures that the use, deployment, duration and effectiveness of covert surveillance and the use of covert human intelligence sources is subject to an authorisation, review and cancellation procedure.

3.2 Definitions

Appendix 1 contains definitions of the terms used within this policy.

3.3 Policy Statement

In some circumstances it may be necessary for Inverclyde Council employees in the course of their duties to make observations of a person in a covert manner and to make use of informants and to conduct undercover operations in a covert manner. By their nature such actions constitute an interference with that person's right to privacy and may give rise to legal challenge as a potential breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 ("the right to respect for private and family life").

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 (RIPSA) together provide a legal framework for covert surveillance and the use of covert human intelligence sources by public authorities (including local authorities) and an independent oversight regime to monitor these activities.

Inverclyde Council employees must adhere to the authorisation framework specified in this policy, and the associated procedures, before conducting any covert surveillance or using a source or allowing or conducting an undercover operation.

Employees of Inverclyde Council will not carry out intrusive surveillance within the meaning of RIPSA. This is covert surveillance of anything taking place on residential premises or in a private vehicle that involves the presence of an individual on the premises or in the vehicle or is carried out by means of a surveillance device capable of providing information of the same quality and detail as might be expected to be obtained from a device actually present on the premises or in the vehicle.

3.4 Objective of the Policy

The objective of this policy, and the associated procedures, is to ensure that all work involving directed surveillance by Inverclyde Council employees is carried out effectively while

remaining in accordance with the law. Directed surveillance is defined as covert surveillance undertaken "for the purposes of a specific investigation or operation" and "in such a manner as is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person". This policy, and the associated procedures, should be read in conjunction with RIPSA and the Scottish Government's Codes of Practice on covert surveillance and the use of covert human intelligence sources.

3.5 Scope of the Policy

This policy, and the associated procedures, apply in all cases where "directed surveillance" is being planned or carried out and in all cases where the use of an undercover officer or source is being planned or carried out. This includes the use of media such as the internet or social media sites (see Appendix 3).

This policy, and the associated procedures, do not apply to:-

- *ad hoc* covert observations that do not involve the systematic surveillance of a specific person.
- observations that are not carried out covertly.
- unplanned observations made as an immediate response to events.
- covert test purchase transactions under existing statutory powers where the officers involved do not establish a personal or other relationship for the purposes stated (see definition of a covert human intelligence source). As an example, the purchase of a music CD for subsequent expert examination would not require authorisation but where the intention is to ascertain from the seller where he buys suspected fakes, when he takes delivery etc, then authorisation should be sought beforehand.
- Tasks given to persons (whether those persons are employees of the Council or not) to ascertain information which is not private e.g. the location of cigarette vending machines in licensed premises.

In all cases of doubt, legal advice should be sought from the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services.

Officers might also find it helpful to consider the Pre RIPSA Authorisation Review Form that is available from Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services, to assist them in deciding whether or not a RIPSA authorisation is required in terms of this policy, and the associated procedures.

3.6 Principles of Directed Surveillance and the Use or Conduct of Covert Human Intelligence Sources

In planning and carrying out directed surveillance or CHIS work, Inverclyde Council employees shall comply with the following principles:-

Lawful purposes

Directed surveillance and source work shall only be carried out where necessary to achieve one or more of the permitted purposes (as defined in RIPSA) namely:-

- for the purposes of preventing or detecting crime or the prevention of disorder

- in the interests of public safety
- for the purpose of protecting public health

Employees carrying out surveillance shall not interfere with any property or harass any person.

Employees carrying out CHIS work or using sources must be aware that a source has no licence to commit crime. Any source that acts beyond the acceptable legal limits in regard to this principle risks prosecution.

Confidential Material

Applications where a significant risk of acquiring confidential material has been identified shall always require the approval of an Authorising Officer.

Confidential material consists of:

- matters subject to legal privilege (for example between professional legal adviser and client)
- confidential personal information (for example relating to a person's physical or mental health)
- confidential journalistic material

Vulnerable Individuals

Vulnerable individuals (such as the mentally impaired) will only be authorised to act as a source in the most exceptional circumstances and the authorisation of the Authorising Officer shall be required.

Juvenile Sources

The use or conduct of any source under 16 years of age living with their parents (or any person having parental responsibilities for them) cannot be authorised in relation to giving information about their parents (or any person having parental responsibilities for them).

Sources under the age of 16 can give information about other members of their immediate family in exceptional cases.

A parent, guardian or other appropriate adult must be present at meetings with the juvenile source. There must always be an officer with responsibility for ensuring compliance with this requirement.

An authorisation for any source under the age of 18 shall not be granted or renewed unless or until:

- the safety and welfare of the juvenile have been fully considered;
- a risk assessment, or an updated risk assessment as appropriate, has been undertaken as part of the application to deploy a juvenile source, covering the physical dangers and the moral and psychological aspects of his/her deployment;
- the Authorising Officer has considered the risk assessment, or an updated risk assessment as appropriate, and is satisfied that any identified risks are justified; and

- the Authorising Officer has satisfied himself/herself that any identified risks will be suitably managed

Deployment of juvenile sources will only be authorised by an Authorising Officer.

3.7 The Authorisation Process

Applications for directed surveillance or the use or conduct of a source will be authorised at level of "Investigations Manager" or "Assistant Head of Service" as prescribed in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Prescription of Offices etc. and Specification of Public Authorities) (Scotland) Order 2010.

For the purposes of Inverclyde Council, the person granting authorisation shall be no lower than Head of Service or its equivalent. For public authorities such as Inverclyde Council, there are no substitutes of lower grade prescribed to authorise "urgent" cases. A list of the current Authorising Officers is attached at Appendix 4.

Authorising Officers within the meaning of this policy, and the associated procedures, shall avoid authorising their own activities wherever possible and only do so in exceptional circumstances. An Authorising Officer should not also act as a controller or handler of a source. These roles should be separate.

Authorisations shall be in writing. However, in urgent cases the authorising officer **may approve** applications orally. A case may be regarded as urgent if the time that would elapse before the Authorising Officer was available to grant the authorisation would, in the judgement of the Authorising Officer, be likely to endanger life or jeopardise the investigation or operation for which authorisation is being given.

All applications for authorisations or renewals of authorisations shall be made on the appropriate form, details of which can be obtained from Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services. The applicant in all cases should complete the form. In urgent cases an oral approval may be given by the Authorising Officer and in such a case a statement that the Authorising Officer has expressly granted the authorisation should be recorded on the application form or, if that is not possible, in the applicant's notebook or diary. This should be done by the person to whom the Authorising Officer spoke (normally the applicant) and must later be endorsed by the Authorising Officer. A written authorisation shall be issued as soon as practicable.

Where an authorisation ceases to be either necessary or appropriate, the Authorising Officer or an appropriate deputy shall cancel the authorisation on the appropriate form.

All forms, codes of practice and supplementary material are available from the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services.

Any person giving an authorisation must be satisfied that:

- account has been taken of the likely degree of intrusion into the privacy of persons other than those directly implicated in the operation or investigation ("collateral intrusion"). Measures must be taken, wherever practicable, to avoid unnecessary intrusion into the lives of those affected by collateral intrusion;
- the authorisation is necessary;

- the authorised surveillance is proportionate; and
- in the case of source work that satisfactory arrangements exist for the management of the source.

Necessity

Surveillance operations and CHIS work shall only be undertaken where there is no reasonable and effective alternative way of achieving the desired objectives.

Effectiveness

Surveillance operations and CHIS work shall be undertaken only by suitably trained or experienced employees or under their direct supervision.

The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) shall be followed when technical equipment is used in any directed surveillance operation. The SOP is available from the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services.

Proportionality

The use of surveillance and sources shall not be excessive i.e. it shall be in proportion to the significance of the matter being investigated. A balance requires to be struck between the degree of intrusion into a person's privacy against the necessity of the surveillance.

3.8 Time Periods

Authorisations

Oral applications expire after 72 hours. If required, authorisations can be renewed for a further period (three months in the case of directed surveillance and 12 months in the case of the use of a covert human intelligence source) if renewed in writing.

Written authorisations expire after three months in the case of directed surveillance and 12 months in the case of the use of a covert human intelligence source; these periods begin on the day from which the authorisation took effect. Authorisations expire after a period of one month in relation to a source under the age of 18.

Review

The Authorising Officer shall review all authorisations at intervals of not more than one month. The appropriate review form should always be used. Details of the review and the decision reached shall be noted on the original application. The results of the review should be recorded on the central register of authorisations.

Renewals

If at any time before an authorisation would expire (including oral authorisations) the Authorising Officer considers it necessary for the authorisation to continue for the purpose for which it was given, it may be renewed in writing for a further period beginning on the day on which the previous authorisation ceases to have effect; the renewal periods are three months in the case of directed surveillance and 12 months in the case of the use of a covert

human intelligence source. Applications should only be made shortly before the authorisation is due to expire.

Any person entitled to authorise may renew authorisations. Authorisations may be renewed more than once, provided that they continue to meet the criteria for authorisation.

Authorisations for the deployment of a juvenile source are renewable for one further period of one month.

3.9 Cancellation

The Authorising Officer or appropriate deputy (or a substitute of the same or more senior rank to that of the authorising officer) must cancel an authorisation if he/she is satisfied that the directed surveillance no longer satisfies the criteria for authorisation or the use or conduct of the source no longer satisfied the criteria for authorisation or that procedures for the management of the source are no longer in place. Where possible a source must be informed that the authorisation has been cancelled.

Records should be kept of the use that was made of an authorisation and in particular what material was acquired. This should contain detail of the covert activity conducted under the authorisation, what had been achieved by that covert activity and what surveillance material, if any, had been acquired. If material has been acquired, then the authorising officer must be satisfied that it is being properly handled, stored or destroyed (for reference see the Scottish Government's Covert Surveillance Code of Practice). The IPCO preferred form of cancellation should always be used.

3.10 Monitoring

Each service or discrete location within services must maintain a record of all applications for authorisation (including its users), renewals, reviews and cancellations. The most senior authoriser in that service or at that location shall maintain the monitoring form. See Appendix 2 for the matters that must be included in the record.

3.11 Security and Retention of Documents

Documents created under these procedures are highly confidential and shall be treated as such. Services shall make proper arrangements for their retention, security and destruction, in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018/the UK General Data Protection Regulation and Inverclyde Council's relevant policies and procedures.

The Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services shall maintain the central register of authorisations. Authorising Officers shall notify him/her of the grant, renewal or cancellation of any authorisations and the name of the Authorising Officer within one working day to ensure the accuracy of the central register.

The Authorising Officer shall retain the original authorisation and all renewal forms until cancelled. On cancellation, the original application, renewal and cancellation forms shall be forwarded to the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services with the Authorising Officer retaining a copy.

The Authorising Officer shall retain the copy forms for at least one year after cancellation. The Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services shall retain the original forms for at least five years after cancellation. In both cases, these will not be destroyed without the authority of the Authorising Officer if practicable.

All information recovered through the use of a source which is relevant to the investigation shall be retained by the Authorising Officer for at least five years after the cancellation of the authorisation or the completion of any court proceeding in which said information was used or referred to. All other information shall be destroyed as soon as the operation is cancelled.

3.12 Oversight and Complaints

The Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) provides an independent review of the use of the powers contained within RIPSAs. This review includes inspection visits by inspectors appointed by the IPCO. An independent tribunal, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal has full powers to investigate cases for use of surveillance. The website for the Investigatory Powers Tribunal has more information on its role and its work, including details of how a person can make a complaint to the Tribunal. <https://investigatorypowerstribunal.org.uk/>.

4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

See Appendix 4 of this Policy (Authorising Officers).

5 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 TRAINING

Training on RIPSAs and the content of this Policy is provided to relevant officers on a regular basis.

5.2 COMMUNICATION OF THE POLICY

This Policy, along with the associated operational procedures and forms will be available on ICON and well as publicly available.

6 RISK

6.1 LEGISLATIVE RISK

This Policy takes into account the requirement of RIPSAs 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This Policy was updated in consultation with the Corporate Management Team and the Information Governance Steering Group.

7.2 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Equality Impact Assessment available at [Equality Impact Assessments 2023 - Inverclyde Council](#)

APPENDIX 1

DEFINITIONS

Covert Human Intelligence Source (“source” or “CHIS”) means a person who establishes or maintains a personal or other relationship with another person for the covert purpose of facilitating anything that:

- covertly uses such a relationship to obtain information or to provide information or to provide access to information to another person, or
- covertly discloses information obtained by the use of such a relationship or as a consequence of the existence of such a relationship.

A relationship is used covertly if, and only if, it is conducted in a manner calculated to ensure that the person is unaware of its purpose.

Directed Surveillance is surveillance that is covert but not intrusive and is undertaken

- for the purpose of a specific investigation or a specific operation, in such a manner as is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person (whether or not one specifically identified for the purposes of the investigation or operation, 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 to be sought for the carrying out of the surveillance.

Intrusive Surveillance is covert surveillance that:

- is carried out in relation to anything taking place on residential premises or in a 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 capable of providing information of the same quality and detail as might be expected to be obtained from a device actually present on the premises or in the vehicle.

Authorising Officer is the person who is entitled to give an authorisation for the use or conduct of a source in accordance with Section 5 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000.

Private Information includes information about a person relating to that person’s private or family life.

Residential Premises means any premises occupied or used, however temporarily, for residential purposes or otherwise as living accommodation.

Private Vehicle means any vehicle that is used primarily for the private purpose of the person who owns it or of a person otherwise having the right to use it. This does not include a person whose right to use a vehicle derives only from having paid, or undertaken to pay, for the use of the vehicle and its driver for a particular journey. A vehicle includes any vessel, aircraft or hovercraft.

Handler means the person referred to in Section 4(6)(a) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 holding an office or position with the Local Authority and who will have day to day responsibility for:-

- dealing with the source on behalf of the Local Authority;
- directing the day to day activities of the source;
- recording the information supplied by the source; and
- monitoring the source's security and welfare.

Controller means the person/the designated managerial Officer within the Local Authority referred to in Section 4(6)(b) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 responsible for the general oversight of the use of the source.

The conduct of a source is action of that source falling within the terms of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 or action incidental to it.

The use of a source is any action to induce, ask or assist a person to engage in the conduct of a source or to obtain information by means of an action of the source.

References to any legislation, regulation, statutory instrument or the like is to the same as it may be varied, supplemented or replaced from time to time.

APPENDIX 2

PARTICULARS TO BE CONTAINED IN RECORDS

- a) the identity of the source;
- b) the identity, where known, used by the source;
- c) any relevant investigating authority other than the authority maintaining the records;
- d) the means by which the source is referred to within each relevant investigating authority;
- e) any other significant information connected with the security and welfare of the source;
- f) any confirmation made by a person granting or renewing an authorisation for the conduct or use of a source that the information in paragraph (e) has been considered and that any identified risks to the security and welfare of the source have where appropriate been properly explained to and understood by the source;
- g) the date when, and the circumstances in which, the source was recruited;
- h) the identities of the persons who, in relation to the source, are discharging or have discharged the functions mentioned in section 7(6)(a) to (c) of the 2000 Act or in any order made by the Scottish Ministers under section 7(2)(c);
- i) the periods during which those persons have discharged those responsibilities;
- j) the tasks given to the source and the demands made of him or her in relation to their activities as a source;
- k) all contacts or communications between the source and a person acting on behalf of any relevant investigating authority;
- l) the information obtained by each relevant investigating authority by the conduct or use of the source;
- m) any dissemination by that authority of information obtained in that way; and
- n) in the case of a source who is not an undercover operative, every payment, benefit or reward and every offer of a payment, benefit or reward that is made or provided by or on behalf of any relevant investigating authority in respect of the source's activities for the benefit of that or any other relevant investigating authority.

APPENDIX 3

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Circumstances that Might Give Rise to an Authorisation of Directed Surveillance

The fact that digital investigation is routine or easy to conduct does not reduce the need for RIPSAs authorisation. It is important to note that individual social networking sites vary in their operation and care should be taken to understand how they work.

Council officers may be called upon in the course of their duties to undertake surveillance by accessing website or social media content. Online activity applies equally to activities that are offline/in person operations.

Surveillance activities needing authorisation might include:

- visiting a third-party website or accessing social media posts, profiles or groups
- visiting/viewing websites, posts, profiles and/or groups regularly over a period of time
- entering into a personal relationship with a third party or parties via online or social media platforms.

If there is any covert use (i.e. the other party does not realise the enquirer is a Council employee) made of these media in support of a specific investigation or operation and any privacy settings are passed, then there are good grounds to consider seeking an authorisation for directed surveillance.

Where privacy settings are available but not applied the data may be considered “open source” and an authorisation is not usually required. However, repeat viewing of “open source” sites may constitute directed surveillance and this has to be considered on a case by case basis.

It is not unlawful for a Council Officer to set up a false identity but it is inadvisable to do so for covert purposes without requisite authorisation.

CHIS

If a relationship is likely to be established or maintained (i.e. the activity is more than mere reading of the site's content) then a CHIS authorisation should be considered.

The identity of a person likely to be known to the subject of interest should not be adopted without authorisation and explicit written consent of the person whose identity is used.

Online Social Media Research in Child Protection cases

In relation to child protection work, social workers carrying out research online on social networking sites in the interests of the child may still engage an individual's rights under Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

A documented decision trail will ensure that parameters are set, both to avoid any interference with Convention rights which is or may be disproportionate to the legitimate aim pursued, and for the protection of individual employees.

Applications to conduct online research in child protection cases will need to be authorised by the Authorising Officer for Inverclyde Health & Social Care Partnership or failing this, the Chief Executive or Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services.

The same approach will also apply to the carrying out of such research in adult protection cases too.

Test Purchases

The criteria for directed surveillance should be applied on a case by case basis. Council officers making undisclosed site visits or test purchases do not count as 'covert human intelligence sources' and such activities generally do not require formal authorization. The use of disguised purchaser details in a simple, overt, electronic purchase does not require a CHIS authorisation, because no relationship is usually established at this stage. However, CHIS authorisation may be required for the use of an internet trading organisation such as eBay when a covert relationship is likely to be formed.

APPENDIX 4

AUTHORISING OFFICERS

1. Louise Long, Chief Executive
2. Ruth Binks, Corporate Director, Education, Communities & Organisational Development
3. Alan Puckrin, Chief Financial Officer
4. Stuart Jamieson, Director, Environment and Regeneration
5. Kate Rocks, Chief Officer, Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership
6. Lynsey Brown, Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services (but only (i) where the RIPSA application is urgent and no other Authorising Officer is available and (ii) another Council solicitor with sufficient knowledge of RIPSA is available to conduct a separate peer review of the application, given the Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services is also the RIPSA Senior Responsible Officer)

(As at November 2024)

SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Lynsey Brown, Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital and Customer Services