

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Audit, Governance and Standards Committee
27 June 2012

From: Director of Corporate Services

Subject: **REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT – REVIEW OF ACTIVITY**

All Wards

1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 The Council, like many public authorities, is governed by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). This Act ensures that public authorities comply with their obligations under the Human Rights Act when undertaking investigations which may interfere with the rights of individuals. The Act introduces safeguards on activities such as surveillance undertaken by public bodies.
- 1.2 The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee has now been given responsibility for RIPA matters. This will involve receiving quarterly reports on any activities which have been authorised under RIPA.

2.0 RIPA ACTIVITIES:

- 2.1 Although RIPA covers a number of activities undertaken by investigatory bodies (e.g., phone tapping by the Security Services and Police) its principle use in respect of Local Authorities relates to:-
- covert surveillance, and
 - covert human intelligence sources.
- 2.2 Covert surveillance covers the monitoring, observing or listening to persons, their movements, conversations or other activities and communications. It may be conducted with or without the assistance of a surveillance device and includes the recording of any information obtained. RIPA is most relevant to the Council's activities in effecting enforcement procedures such as the investigation and prosecution of offences. This would not normally include the initial investigation of contraventions such as planning enforcement or noise investigations, but would normally involve the later stages where criminal activity was a possibility. Although this could technically include breaches of Planning Enforcement Notices, breaches of Environmental Health Notices, dog fouling, fly tipping, fraud, etc., the Council's use of the powers has been very limited in recent years. For example, the Council has only used authorisations under the Act on two occasions in the last three years.
- 2.3 Another use of the Act is for the Police to authorise use of the Council's CCTV system for specific operations (general use of CCTV is not covered by the Act because this is not covert surveillance). The Police occasionally authorise themselves to use the Council's CCTV system for covert surveillance.

- 2.4 Covert human intelligence sources relate to the use of a third party to gather information. For example, this could be an informer or someone used to undertake test purchases. This is not an activity that the Council engages in at all.
- 2.5 The only area in which the Council very occasionally involves itself where RIPA might be relevant is covert surveillance. It is necessary for the Council therefore to follow the legislation and the requirements of Government Codes of Practice. Most of the requirements of the Code are dealt with at an Officer level. However, Members are expected to approve a Policy on RIPA and to have some involvement in the monitoring of how the Council implements RIPA requirements.

3.0 MONITORING OF RIPA ACTIVITY:

- 3.1 Codes of Practice on RIPA recommend that quarterly reports are made to Members on RIPA activity. Consideration of such reports has been delegated to the Audit and Governance Committee. This report therefore constitutes one of those reports and is intended to cover the period 1 April – 30 June 2012. There was no activity undertaken by the Council which had RIPA implications and therefore it is recommended that the Committee note the position.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 It is recommended that it be noted that no RIPA activity was undertaken by the Council during the period 1 April – 30 June 2012.

MARTYN RICHARDS

Background papers: HDC RIPA Register of Authorisations

Author ref: JMR

Contact: Martyn Richards
Director of Corporate Services
Direct Line No: (01609) 767010