



Office of Surveillance
Commissioners

The Rt. Hon. Sir Christopher Rose
Chief Surveillance Commissioner
Office of Surveillance Commissioners
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10 August 2013

MELTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT

Inspection Date 6 August 2013
Inspector His Honour David Hodson
 Assistant Surveillance Commissioner

Introduction.

1. Melton Borough Council serves a population of approximately 50,000 people with a staff of approximately 160. Melton Mowbray – often described as the “UK’s Rural Capital of Food” – is its principal town. Otherwise the Borough is mainly rural. Following the fire at its previous offices in 2008 the new building - referred to in the 2010 inspection report – has been completed and the Council now occupies fine, spacious new premises.
2. The Council Management Structure is headed by the Chief Executive, Ms Lynn Aisbett. She is supported by two strategic directors and four heads of service. The Chief Executive’s address is Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 1GH.
3. I was able to conduct the inspection with the help of Ms Angela Tebbutt, Head of Communications and RIPA Monitoring Officer, and Ms Verina Wenham, the Head of Legal Services and RIPA Senior Responsible Officer. Ms Wenham is also RIPA Senior Responsible Officer and Monitoring Officer at the neighbouring Harborough District Council. At the end of the Inspection I was able to have a useful and informal discussion with the Chief Executive.

RIPA Structure

4. At the time of the last RIPA inspection there were 10 authorising officers of which Ms Wenham was one. The Inspector, Mr Nettleship, recommended that the number should be substantially reduced. There are now five – the Chief Executive, the two Strategic Directors, the Head of Regulatory Services and the Head of Communities. Ms Wenham is not now an authorising officer. This recommendation has therefore been discharged.

Council RIPA Policy and Guidance

5. An excellent new Policy and Guidance Document has just - 17 July 2013 – been approved by the full Council and it is available on the Council Intranet. Its authors deserve congratulation for the clear way the Council's RIPA policy and procedures are set out. There are a few minor amendments that need to be made which I was able to discuss with Ms Wenham and which she readily accepted. In short the amendments necessary cover the duration and renewal of particular authorisations.
6. I felt that it might be helpful if the Guidance notes could be amplified to explain the precise procedure that should be adopted when an application was being submitted to the Magistrates for approval. Ms Wenham indicated that she intended to prepare such a note which could be read in conjunction with paragraph 1.4.1 of the Guidance.
7. As there has not yet been any application that has required judicial approval the process has not been tested. I suggested that it might be helpful if a protocol could be established with the Magistrates agreeing an acceptable procedure. Ms Wenham is going to consider this suggestion. The new process will not be made any easier by the fact that the Melton Mowbray Magistrates Court has been closed and any application will now have to be made in Loughborough.
8. In the previous report Mr Nettleship made a number of recommendations at paragraphs 38-39 in respect of the draft policy document which was then before him. Those have all been incorporated in the newly approved document and the Inspector's recommendations may be said to have been discharged.

Training.

9. Very soon after the previous inspection further training was given in October 2010. Recently, comprehensive training was provided for both Melton and

Harborough Councils by Act Now. This took place in February and May 2013 and a list of those who attended has been provided. Each lasted for a full day and I have seen the printout of the slides used in the presentations. They are undoubtedly comprehensive and accurate. I was told that they were delivered in a lively and entertaining manner and all agreed that the training had been beneficial. There is little doubt that anyone dealing with RIPA applications in this Council should now have a thorough knowledge of what criteria they must apply.

10. Mr Nettleship had recommended further refresher training in his 2010 report. It is clear that has been successfully accomplished.

Central Record of Authorisations.

11. In the three year period since the last Inspection there have been **no** authorisations and, consequently, there were no documents to examine. There has been no application refused. Ms Wenham believes that it is likely that the present pattern will continue.

CCTV

12. The position with the Council's CCTV system as to deployment of cameras and use remains very much the same as in 2010. I therefore saw no reason either to visit the premises used or to make any further comments.

Conclusion

13. There has been marked satisfactory progress since the last inspection and all those associated with RIPA work in this Council can take great credit in what has been achieved. All the recommendations of the previous Inspector have been implemented, an excellent Policy and Guidance Document has been produced and up to date training for all those associated with the RIPA process has been provided.
14. When there has been no RIPA usage at all during the inspection period the Council might have allowed itself to fall into complacency, not keep up to date with training and not keep abreast of legislative changes. There is not the slightest hint that this Council has fallen into these traps. On the contrary it is now in a position – should the need arise – to deal properly and efficiently with any RIPA authorisation. I am confident that all the necessary arrangements are in place for this to happen.
15. I have no formal recommendations to make but I hope that the few suggestions I have ventured will be considered for implementation.
16. I am most grateful to Ms Tebbutt and Ms Wenham for their friendly welcome, for making the inspection run so smoothly and engaging so co-operatively with it.

His Hon. David Hodson
Assistant Surveillance Commissioner.
16 August 2013