

Dear Sir,

Reports in some weekend newspapers covered the use of terror laws by council official.

One case highlighted was the well reported use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) by Poole Council to track parents suspected of cheating the school catchment system. This Council also used the same powers to spy on fishermen to determine if they were illegally gathering shellfish.

Bad enough if these were isolated incidents. However it turns out that some twelve Councils have used an Act of Parliament designed to defeat terrorism for surveillance into dog fouling, misuse of disabled parking, employees working while off sick, fly tipping, selling counterfeit good and more.

Our very own Sunderland City Council has used (abused) these powers on 15 authorised occasions. This has taken the form of physical surveillance of members of the public and the recording of photographic images re sale of counterfeit goods, tobacco purchases, benefits investigations and ASBO investigation.

Remember the worries that were expressed when this legislation was going through Parliament and the assurances that this would only be used in the fight against terrorism.

This is what makes current proposals for detention for 42 days without trial so worrying. The same assurances will be made but should we not worry with these powers in the hands of officialdom?

Yours faithfully

Councillor Alan Wright  
*Conservative St Chad's.*