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## Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by Robin T Cox - 2008/09/14 11:08

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Anti-terror powers were used by Fife Council to spy on a member of the public after his neighbour complained about his noisy wardrobe doors and loud footsteps, according to today's Sunday Telegraph.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/politics/lawandorder/2910962/Council-uses-anti-terror-rules-to-spy-on-man-with-noisy-wardrobe.html>

Under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA), whose introduction was originally justified as a counter-terrorism measure, councils now use extensive snooping powers.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulation\\_of\\_Investigatory\\_Powers\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulation_of_Investigatory_Powers_Act)

Fife Council, which placed sensitive recording equipment in the homes of residents who complained about noise emanating from neighbouring properties, has admitted that the detection equipment used can pick up private conversations.

Often in these kinds of operation it is up to the complainant to decide how and when to use the highly sensitive equipment.

Council officials assume that the complainants will destroy any confidential conversations that they might record.

In October last year the council placed equipment in the bedroom of a complainant to detect "the alleged noise of sliding wardrobe doors, noise of persons in flat and loud music and television".

Documents show that council officials believed the behaviour of "the perpetrator" to be "an intrusion into the rights of the neighbour".

So take care. The walls have ears.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by TLJ - 2008/09/14 11:14

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A quite ridiculous use of these powers.

Surely all they needed was something which measured and recorded the sound levels ?

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by DoricMan - 2008/09/15 11:32

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These methods were used in respect of an elderly Fife tenant I knew well some years ago. The man complained of voices and other noises coming from a neighbouring flat, I will not relate them here. To find out what, if anything was the cause, audio monitoring and recording equipment was installed at the point where the noise was said to be loudest. I was in the man's house that evening, and saw the equipment, and he gave me an account of Fife Council's substantial help, which he valued.

Sadly no noise was found and soon after the poor man was diagnosed with Alzheimers, and was taken into care shortly afterwards.

I am not impressed with the Telegraph article's use of "Terror laws", and other slants. Fife Council, in the case of my friend acted properly, and with compassion in this difficult situation.

Fife Council does not need the Telegraph or its disapproval, and I hope Scotsgait understands my anger.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by Martin - 2008/09/15 15:08

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Hi DM, while no doubt this is a very sad and unfortunate case, I would challenge the equipment used by Fife Council

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here.

Would a simple decibel meter which would measure the noise level without recording the specific conversations not have served the same purpose, that is, to ascertain if the noise level was intrusive? I don't see the need for using equipment as high tech as this to judge nuisance.

I suspect that this was not really an attempt at intrusion, rather the boys saw a chance to play with toys!!

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by Jimbo - 2008/09/15 18:53

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Hi Martin,

I don't see the need for using equipment as high tech as this to judge nuisance.

I wholeheartedly agree. Allowing a neighbour to eavesdrop on an other's private conversations is an intrusion on that person's civil liberties. A decibel meter would have been just as effective.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by DoricMan - 2008/09/16 11:48

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Martin wrote:

Hi DM, while no doubt this is a very sad and unfortunate case, I would challenge the equipment used by Fife Council here.

Would a simple decibel meter which would measure the noise level without recording the specific conversations not have served the same purpose, that is, to ascertain if the noise level was intrusive? I don't see the need for using equipment as high tech as this to judge nuisance.

I suspect that this was not really an attempt at intrusion, rather the boys saw a chance to play with toys!!The recording equipment I saw in use in my friend's house recorded sound levels, I believe in db's, speech was not recorded. Appropriate equipment was employed on this occasion, and not the derogatory boys toys as you wrote. It is easy to jump to other incorrect conclusions based on the article, or other assumptions, and is no substitute for being there equipped with the appropriate technical knowledge.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by Robin T Cox - 2008/09/16 14:34

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Whilst there may be such deserving cases as the one quoted by DoricMan, there remain two issues.

1. Do such cases justify the use of powers that were granted on the basis that they were necessary in order to defend us from terrorism? If additional powers were needed in order to protect us from inconsiderate neighbours, then why were not such powers obtained on that basis?

2. There have been many, many instances where RIPA has been used for far less deserving cases, to such an extent that the charge of unwarranted snooping has merit and should be answered.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by DoricMan - 2008/09/16 19:15

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Robin T Cox wrote:

Whilst there may be such deserving cases as the one quoted by DoricMan, there remain two issues.

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1. Do such cases justify the use of powers that were granted on the basis that they were necessary in order to defend us from terrorism? If additional powers were needed in order to protect us from inconsiderate neighbours, then why were not such powers obtained on that basis?

2. There have been many, many instances where RIPA has been used for far less deserving cases, to such an extent that the charge of unwarranted snooping has merit and should be answered.

The points you make Robin are of concern to us all, as they use disproportionate use, illegal perhaps, of inappropriate powers. All of us would be concerned should this ever happen.

To return to what I saw in this incident. The sound recording was in Decibels, recorded by a pen recorder using a graphic paper roll. I saw a few hours of the pen recording, and the sound energy it had written to the graphic roll. At no time did Fife Council overstep recording speech, or other wrongful data gathering in this incident, and I was extremely satisfied by their concern and compassion.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by Bigman - 2008/09/22 23:51

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I just wrote a massive response to this but i lost it so i can't be bothered writing it again.

and loud music and television".

Would you put up with that week in week out, would you fek!

The sliding wardrobe doors is a headline grabber, the council doesn't monitor wardrobe doos FFS, did you actually believe that shite?

To cut a long story short.....pish, anti terror laws my arse!

Every council have 'authorised officers' like health and safety officers, myself, dog warderns, technical officers etc etc and we have limited powers, i.e we have powers of entry and the like.

Psst, i'll let you into a wee secret, papers hype stories to sell more copies, the reporter spent about an hour and a half with my area manager and he gave him all the details regarding this particular case, were the points discussed reported, were they fek, negative stories sell papers not the 10,000 successful night time noise team jobs that have been carried since this particular team was set up freeing up police time so they can catch real crooks like drivers doing 34 in a 30 zone (i jest)

This is the biggest storm in a tea cup i have read in ages, if the council did bugger all about the noise the headline in the paper would be 'Fife Council does hee haw to dampen down noisy neighbour from hell'

P.S. the council have monitored 'noisy neighbours' for a lot of years now, its not a new thing, how on earth do you think LA's can evict a noisy neighbour without evidence?

If any of you posters have problems with noisy neighbours you'd want something done about it, i know i had to put up with it for a long time and i was at the end of my tether, the placing of noise monitoring equipment next door is nothing new.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by Levenax - 2008/09/23 08:19

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Noisy neighbours are a major cause of distress and annoyance to normal people and councils should do whatever it takes to stop the antisocial behaviour including evicting persistant offenders. This whole story sounded fishy to me and I'm glad Bigman found enough time out from nappy changing to set the record straight.

BTW Bigman I've been timed out a few times just as I've finished the last sentence of a masterpiece and yous wans have missed out. Cut & paste or save as you go avoids a lot of swears. :)

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by Bigman - 2008/09/23 10:34

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I know, i do that sometimes usually click 'copy' but i just clicked the wrong button.

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## Re:Fife Council spies on man with noisy wardrobe

Posted by DoricMan - 2008/09/23 12:52

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Bigman wrote:

I know, i do that sometimes usually click 'copy' but i just clicked the wrong button.Its a problem that we all have from time to time Bigman. Now I'll use my foot pedal to post this.

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