



Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy for Otterford Parish Council

Purpose

This policy outlines the responsible, ethical, and transparent use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools by Otterford Parish Council to support its duties, including local planning evaluations, maintenance of parish facilities, and environmental and conservation responsibilities. It aims to enhance efficiency, improve decision-making, and ensure fairness while addressing the council's limited resources and rural context.

Scope

This policy applies to all Otterford Parish Council members, employees, and volunteers using AI tools for council-related activities. It covers AI systems such as chatbots, data analytics tools, and document generation software.

Principles

1. **Transparency:** All AI use will be clearly documented and communicated to residents when relevant.
2. **Fairness:** AI tools will be audited to prevent bias and ensure equitable outcomes, particularly in planning and community services.
3. **Accountability:** Human oversight will be maintained for **all** AI-driven decisions.
4. **Privacy:** AI use will comply with UK GDPR and protect residents' personal data.
5. **Proportionality:** AI adoption will be practical, cost-effective, and suited to the council's small scale and rural needs.

Permitted AI Uses

AI tools may be used to support the following council functions, subject to approval by the Parish Council:

- **Administrative Efficiency:** Generating meeting minutes, summarizing correspondence, or drafting reports (e.g., using tools like Microsoft Copilot's Magic Notes, as trialled by Somerset Council).
- **Planning Support:** Analysing planning applications for compliance with local policies including conservation and enhancement.
- **Community Engagement:** Deploying simple AI chatbots to respond to residents' queries.

- **Environmental Monitoring:** Using AI for tasks like assessing tree preservation or detecting fly-tipping (inspired by Wolverhampton Council's AI-powered CCTV).

Implementation Guidelines

1. **Tool Selection:**
 - Only use AI tools from reputable providers with clear data privacy policies.
 - Prioritise low-cost or open-source solutions to align with the council's budget constraints.
 - Example: Microsoft Copilot, as used by Somerset Council, for document drafting.
2. **Training:**
 - Council members and volunteers will receive basic AI training on request.
 - Training will cover ethical AI use, bias detection, and data protection.
3. **Data Privacy:**
 - AI tools must comply with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
 - No personal resident data will be input into AI systems without explicit consent.
 - Regular audits will ensure data security, especially for tools handling planning or environmental data.
4. **Bias Mitigation:**
 - AI outputs will be reviewed for bias, particularly in planning decisions, to avoid discrimination.
5. **Human Oversight:**
 - All AI-generated outputs (e.g., planning recommendations, meeting summaries) must be reviewed and approved by a council member before action.
 - AI will not make autonomous decisions affecting residents or council policy.
6. **Cost Management:**
 - AI adoption will be limited to tools with clear cost-benefit justification.
 - Explore funding opportunities.

Ethical Considerations

- **Community Trust:** Residents will be informed about AI use through council meetings and the Otterford Parish Council website.
- **Environmental Impact:** AI tools will be selected with consideration of their carbon footprint, aligning with the council's environmental responsibilities in the Blackdown Hills.

Monitoring and Review

- **Annual Review:** The Parish Council will review this policy annually to ensure it remains relevant and effective.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Residents can provide feedback on AI use via the council clerk.

- **Reporting:** A summary of AI usage and outcomes will be included in the council's annual accounts for public scrutiny.

Constraints

- **Resource Limitations:** Given Otterford's small population (356) and limited budget, AI adoption will prioritize low-cost, scalable solutions.
- **Infrastructure:** AI tools must be compatible with existing council IT systems, such as Microsoft Teams, as used by Somerset Council.
- **Collaboration:** The council will seek guidance from Somerset Council, which has experience with AI tools like Copilot and Magic Notes, to ensure best practices.

Legal Compliance

- **Intellectual Property:** AI-generated content will be checked for copyright compliance, following the UK Government's consultation on AI and copyright.

Approval

This policy was approved by Otterford Parish Council on Tuesday 12th August and is effective immediately. For enquiries, contact the Parish Clerk at clerk@otterfordparishcouncil.gov.uk

Prepared by Helen Andrew, Parish Clerk

August 5th 2025