



Responsible and Safe Use of AI Policy

TOTNES TOWN COUNCIL

AGREED JANUARY 2026

FOR REVIEW APRIL 2026

1. Purpose

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools now play an increasing role in helping local authorities work more efficiently, support decision-making, and improve the quality of written information. When used properly, AI is a helpful assistant as it supports the work of officers and members, but it does not replace human judgement.

This policy sets out how Totnes Town Council will use AI safely, lawfully, and responsibly, ensuring that:

- Sensitive or confidential data is protected
- AI outputs are used with care and verification
- Only secure, approved systems are used
- Officers and members understand both the benefits and the risks

This policy applies to **all staff, officers, contractors, volunteers, and Councillors** when carrying out any Council business, whether on Council-owned devices or personal devices.

2. Approved AI Systems

The Council currently approves **two AI systems** for internal use:

Microsoft 365 Copilot

Where a Council licence is provided, Copilot may be used because:

- All data remains within the Council's Microsoft 365 tenant
- It uses the same secure permissions as Outlook, Teams, and SharePoint
- No data is used to train public AI models
- Microsoft meets UK GDPR and public sector security standards (ISO 27001; National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) guidance)

Gov Assist (Cloudy IT)

Currently **used only by the Town Clerk**, this system:

- Operates within UK-based, GDPR-compliant data centres
- Retains all data as the Council's property
- Does not send information to OpenAI's public systems
- Provides an auditable, sealed environment designed for local government

AI Note-Taking in Meetings

The Council uses AI-supported transcription or summarisation tools through paid Zoom and Microsoft Teams accounts.

To maintain confidentiality:

- No confidential Full Council or committee sessions are recorded or summarised using AI.
- Any informal meetings dealing with sensitive matters must use Teams, which meets the same security standard as Copilot.

3. Permitted Uses of AI

AI is a practical tool to save time and improve clarity. Officers and members may use approved AI tools only to:

- Draft reports, letters, agendas, or meeting summaries
- Reformat or improve the tone and readability of written work
- Summarise long reports or transcripts
- Generate ideas, options, or structures for consultations or public engagement
- Clarify technical information in plain English

AI should be treated as **a thinking partner**, not an author or decision-maker.

All outputs must be checked and edited before use by the officer or member.

4. Prohibited Uses of AI

To protect data, reputation, and legal compliance, the following uses are strictly prohibited.

4.1 Shadow AI – Absolutely Forbidden

“Shadow AI” means any AI tool outside the Council's approved systems, including:

- Public ChatGPT
- Google Gemini / Bard
- AI features on personal Microsoft, Google, Apple accounts
- Free online writing, note-taking, translation, or image-generation tools
- Smartphone apps with embedded AI features
- Any AI product not licensed or approved by the Council or its IT providers

No officer or member may use shadow AI for any Council-related task whatsoever.

This includes copying or pasting text, uploading documents, or using personal accounts to draft or summarise material.

4.2 Handling of Sensitive or Confidential Information

You must **not** enter into AI systems:

- Personal data (names, addresses, HR information, staff matters, salaries, phone numbers, email addresses)

- Legally sensitive or confidential documents (staffing, legal disputes, tenders, disciplinary matters)
- Any unredacted data relating to individuals or commercially confidential material

If in doubt, **do not use AI**.

4.3 Prohibition on AI-Generated Images

To protect artistic integrity, avoid copyright risks, and support local creative professionals, the Council will not use AI to generate:

- Photographs
- Branding
- Logos
- Graphics or illustrations

5. Safeguards and Required Practices

To ensure safe and responsible AI use:

Use only approved tools

Copilot (with a Council licence), Teams, Zoom AI (as described), and Gov Assist (Clerk only).

Redact or anonymise sensitive information

If a document contains personal or confidential information, remove identifiers before using AI or do not use AI at all.

Maintain human oversight

AI is advisory. Officers and members remain fully responsible for decisions, reports, and published material.

Verify all outputs

Check for accuracy, tone, relevance, and potential bias. AI may make errors or produce outdated or misleading information.

Store documents correctly

Misplaced SharePoint or Teams files can be surfaced by Copilot.

Always save documents in the correct Council folders and report any inappropriate access immediately.

Transparency

Where relevant, note that AI supported the drafting process (internal comment or note).

Report concerns

Raise any uncertainty with the Clerk or Data Protection Officer before proceeding.

6. Why This Approach Is Responsible

This policy ensures:

- **Compliance** with UK GDPR
- **Security**, as all information stays within approved, encrypted systems
- **Transparency and accountability** for all AI-generated content
- **Proportionate use**, supporting efficiency without handling sensitive data
- **Support for local creative industry**, by avoiding AI image generation
- **Confident, safe working practices**, reducing risk to the Council, its staff, and the public

AI assists our work, it does not drive it. Human judgement remains at the centre of Council operations.

7. Training and Building Confidence

The Council recognises that AI is a developing area. Confidence grows through practice and understanding.

To support this:

- Further training for staff and members will be sought on request.
- Officers and members will be able to ask questions and see practical examples
- Training will emphasise safe use, accuracy, and professional responsibility
- The aim is to empower users — *“You control it; it doesn’t control you.”*

8. Future Changes and Review of This Policy

The Council is actively considering:

- Upgrading all staff to Microsoft 365 Copilot licences, operating within a sealed and secure tenant
- Ending the Gov Assist contract, once Copilot is fully adopted
- Strengthening tenant security with Business Premium and Enforcer licences
- A trial of one Copilot licence prior to full rollout before the Gov Assist contract ends

If these changes are approved:

- All staff AI use will move to a single, secure Copilot environment
- Confidential information will remain protected under tenant permissions
- A full revised AI Policy will be brought to members March/April 2026

Until then, this interim policy remains in force in full.

This AI policy will be reviewed every 3–6 months, or sooner if required by legislative or technical change, to reflect the speed of change in this developing technology.