

# Cotswold District Council

## Artificial Intelligence Adoption Strategy

### 2026

#### **1. Introduction**

Cotswold District Council is adopting artificial intelligence (AI) in a responsible, practical and cost-effective way. This strategy outlines how AI will improve services for residents and businesses whilst preparing the council for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2028. The approach focuses on clear benefits, strong governance, and avoiding unnecessary complexity.

#### **2. Strategic Objectives**

AI will be used to:

- Improve access to information and make services easier to use.
- Reduce administrative workload for officers and councillors.
- Support financial sustainability through efficiency gains.
- Strengthen consistency and quality in decision-support processes.
- Ensure the council is ready to transfer tools and processes to the new unitary authority.

AI will not replace human decision-making without an assessment of the risks of such decisions being considered and approved. Human oversight remains essential.

### **3. Principles for Responsible AI Use**

The council's methodology is governed by five fundamental principles:

#### **3.1 Resident First**

Artificial intelligence will be leveraged to enhance customer experience, streamline communication, and improve accessibility to services.

#### **3.2 Safe and Accountable**

All outputs generated by AI will undergo human review, ensuring transparency regarding the application of AI technology.

#### **3.3 Business Case Led Adoption**

AI initiatives are required to demonstrate clear benefits, such as improved efficiency, enhanced quality, or better service delivery; all investments must be substantiated by robust business cases.

#### **3.4 Simplicity and Portability**

Mainstream, secure platforms will be utilized to ensure ease of transfer to new authorities. Where appropriate, AI will also be integrated into essential corporate systems. The total cost of ownership and LGR will influence all decisions.

#### **3.5 Skills and Confidence:**

Staff will receive comprehensive training and guidance to ensure safe and effective use of AI.

### **4. Service Priority Areas for Adoption**

#### **4.1 Customer Services**

- Faster, clearer responses to residents.
- AI guidance tools for common enquiries.
- Enhancements for telephone and online queries.
- Ensuring residents can choose a human adviser during business hours

## 4.2 Planning Services

- Automating Validation Checks on applications
- Summarising applications and consultee comments.
- Support with Local Plan analysis.
- Drafting and refining reports.
- Improving timeliness and consistency in case handling.

## 4.3 Democratic Services

- Drafting minutes from transcripts.
- Summarising lengthy documents.
- Improved search across minutes and decisions.

## 4.4 Climate and Sustainability

- Support for retrofit and energy-efficiency guidance.
- Data analysis for carbon reporting.
- Automating routine reporting.

## 4.5 Corporate Support Functions

- Drafting routine letters, reports or guidance.
- Improving internal document search.
- Supporting HR, Legal and Finance with summarisation and research.

## 4.6 Councillors

- Summaries of key documents.
- Support responding to resident enquiries.
- Briefing preparation for meetings.

# 5. Governance and Assurance

Robust governance will ensure AI is safe, ethical and transparent. We will adopt the following control mechanisms.

## 5.1 AI Board

A cross-council board will oversee major AI proposals, ensuring:

- There is a sound financial business case.
- Legal and ethical compliance.
- Alignment with priorities.
- Risk assessment and mitigation.
- Portability for the new unitary authority.
- Environmental responsibility

## 5.2 Human Oversight

- All processes that use AI are mapped and understood before any automation takes place.
- Officers must review AI-generated content for reports before use.
- No automated decision-making in statutory or high-risk areas –other automated decision making to be risk assessed and the approach approved by the AI Board.

## 5.3 Transparency Requirements

- Residents must know when AI is being used.
- AI tools must not be presented as human.
- Informal advice (e.g., planning or climate) must be clearly labelled.

## 6. Technology Approach

### 6.1 Approved AI Platforms

The council will minimise risk and cost by focusing on a small number of secure and trusted approved platforms. Whenever possible, the Council will take advantage of existing environments and contracts, for example the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement.

Proprietary AI built into existing systems will be considered where integration benefits outweigh long-term constraints and where there is no or limited financial impact of adopting this approach.

## **6.2 Platform Register and Approval Processes**

The ICT service will maintain an AI Platform Register that lists all approved tools and models. The register will:

- Capture the AI platforms in use across the council.
- Evaluate tools for compliance, reliability and security.
- Provide guidance to officers on approved options.
- Ensure portability to the new unitary authority.

## **6.3 IT Capability and Skills**

Strong capability within IT service is essential to delivering the council's AI ambitions. The council will work with Publica to:

- Develop AI skills within the IT team to support model evaluation and AI assurance.
- Build capability in AI development.
- Support integration of AI with existing systems where beneficial.
- Provide architectural oversight on AI projects.
- Ensure AI tools meet security, accessibility and performance standards.

## **6.4 Shared Learning and Collaboration Across Gloucestershire**

Where beneficial, the council will work with neighbouring authorities to share learning, tools and governance approaches. This may include:

- Sharing AI agents or templates for common functions.
- Joint exploration of AI opportunities with county partners.
- Contributing to county-wide digital or transformation groups.

## **7. Measuring Impact**

### **7.1 Outcomes by end of 2027**

- AI widely used in customer-facing and back-office functions.
- Consistent improvements in response times and resident satisfaction.
- Meaningful productivity gains captured across priority services.
- A maturing AI culture with high confidence across officers and councillors.

### **7.2 Key indicators**

- Faster response times and improved service satisfaction.
- Reduced administrative workload and fewer backlogs.
- Improved accuracy and consistency of outputs.
- Producing financial savings supporting the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- Improved accessibility of information for residents and councillors.

## **8. Implementation Roadmap (2026–2028)**

### **8.1 May 2026 – September 2026**

- Establish AI Board.
- Identify resource requirements.
- Development of governance documents.
- Development of baseline training.
- Configure technology platform choices
- Modify ICT Asset Register to identify AI enabled applications
- Develop processes to inform Public of AI usage.
- Participate in Gloucestershire AI sharing workshops.
- Launch Salesforce enabled AI customer service processes already developed.
- Develop and Publish pilot internal AI Agents

## 8.2 October 2026 – March 2027

- Launch baseline training
- Launch AI Champions
- Develop and publish additional internal AI Agents
- Develop and pilot external AI Agents for specific service areas – e.g. planning, climate change.
- Monitor benefits and refine governance.

## 8.3 April 2027 onwards

- Strengthening training and support for staff.
- Scale successful tools across services.
- Expand planning and climate guidance agents.
- Ensure all tools are portable and well-documented.
- Provide training materials, case studies and governance templates.
- Support transition activities with shadow unitary arrangements.

## 9. Environmental Responsibility

- AI projects must consider carbon impact.
- Preference for suppliers using energy-efficient platforms.
- Only scale tools where benefits justify environmental cost.
- AI should support climate objectives, such as reducing travel or improving retrofit guidance.

## 10. Summary and Commitment

This strategy sets a clear, practical approach to AI adoption that supports better services, reduces workload, improves financial sustainability and prepares the council for the upcoming transition. The council commits to responsible, transparent use of AI that enhances—not replaces—human judgement.