Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

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1. Purpose

Diss Town Council recognises that Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are increasingly being used to support administrative functions, communication, and service delivery. The Council supports the responsible use of AI where it can improve efficiency and productivity, while ensuring that all use remains transparent, lawful, proportionate, and subject to appropriate human oversight.

The Council is committed to the responsible, ethical, transparent, and lawful use of AI. This policy establishes the principles and requirements governing the use of AI systems by councillors, employees, contractors, volunteers, and suppliers acting on behalf of the Council. It aims to ensure that AI supports, rather than replaces, human judgement and that public trust remains at the centre of all Council activity.

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2. Scope

This policy applies to:

a) All councillors and employees.

b) Contractors, consultants, volunteers, and agency workers.

c) Any AI system, service, application, or tool used in connection with Council business.

d) Both publicly available and commercially licensed AI tools.

This policy covers generative AI systems (such as Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT) as well as other AI applications including automation, data analysis, transcription, image generation, and decision-support systems.

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3. Definition of Artificial Intelligence

For the purposes of this policy, Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to software systems capable of performing tasks commonly associated with human intelligence, including generating content, analysing information, making predictions, recognising patterns, or assisting decision-making.

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4. Guiding Principles

The Council will use AI in accordance with the following principles:

4.1 Human Accountability

All decisions remain the responsibility of appropriately authorised Council officers or councillors. AI must not be used as the sole basis for decisions affecting residents, staff, suppliers, or stakeholders.

4.2 Transparency

The Council is committed to being transparent about its use of AI where such use may be of interest or relevance to residents, councillors, stakeholders, or decision-makers.

Routine administrative uses of AI, including spelling and grammar checking, formatting, transcription, note-taking, research assistance and preliminary drafting assistance, do not normally require disclosure.

Where AI has materially contributed to analysis, recommendations, decision-making support or public-facing content, and where that contribution could reasonably influence the content, conclusions or decisions arising from it, the use of AI should be disclosed.

The Council will ensure that residents are informed where AI is used to provide services directly, such as through chatbots or automated customer interactions.

Regardless of any AI assistance provided, responsibility for all Council decisions, communications, reports and actions remains with appropriately authorised officers or councillors.

4.3 Fairness

AI must not be used in ways that could unlawfully discriminate against individuals or groups.

4.4 Privacy and Security

The use of AI must comply with:

a) UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)

b) Data Protection Act 2018

c) Freedom of Information Act 2000

d) Council Information Governance policies

4.5 Public Benefit

AI should be used only where it supports the Council's objectives, improves efficiency, enhances service delivery, or provides demonstrable value for money.

5. Permitted Uses

Examples of acceptable use include:

a) Drafting agendas, reports, minutes, newsletters, and communications.

b) Responding to resident enquiries and correspondence.

c) Summarising documents and research.

d) Generating first drafts of policies and procedures.

e) Improving grammar, readability, and accessibility of documents.

f) Assisting with project planning and administrative tasks.

g) Supporting website content development.

h) Analysing non-confidential datasets.

i) Producing meeting transcripts where approved tools are used.

5.1 AI-Assisted Correspondence

The Council recognises that approved AI tools may assist officers in responding efficiently to resident enquiries and routine correspondence.

AI may be used to:

a) Draft responses to enquiries.

b) Improve clarity, readability and tone.

c) Summarise background information.

d) Assist with administrative tasks associated with correspondence.

All correspondence sent on behalf of the Council must be reviewed and approved by a Council officer prior to issue. The officer remains responsible for ensuring the response is accurate, appropriate and compliant with Council policies and legal obligations.

Residents shall not be provided with responses generated and issued solely by AI without appropriate human oversight and review.

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6. Prohibited Uses

The following activities are prohibited unless specifically authorised following a formal assessment:

a) Uploading confidential, sensitive, personal, or special category data into public AI systems.

b) Using AI to make autonomous decisions affecting individuals.

c) Using AI to generate misleading, deceptive, defamatory, or unlawful content.

d) Using AI in a manner inconsistent with Council policies.

e) Allowing AI tools to publish information automatically without human review.

f) Using unapproved AI tools on Council devices or networks.

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7. Data Protection and Information Security

The Council is committed to ensuring that all use of AI complies with data protection, information governance and security requirements.

Before using any AI system, users must consider whether the information being processed includes:

a) Personal data.
b) Financial information.
c) Commercially sensitive information.
d) Confidential Council information.
e) Information relating to employees, councillors, residents or service users.

All AI use must comply with existing Council policies relating to:

a) Data Protection

b) Information Security

c) Record Management

d) Freedom of Information

e) Cyber Security

Where necessary, a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) shall be completed before introducing new AI systems.

7.1 Personal Data and Confidential Information

Personal data, special category personal data, confidential Council information, sensitive commercial information or information relating to ongoing investigations must not be entered into an AI system unless:

a) The system has been formally approved for Council use.
b) Appropriate contractual, security and data protection safeguards are in place.
c) The use is authorised and lawful.
d) Only the minimum information necessary is provided.

Where AI is used to assist with drafting, summarising or reviewing documents, personal information should be anonymised or redacted wherever reasonably practicable before being entered into the system.

Users remain responsible for ensuring that all information processed through AI systems is handled securely and appropriately.

8. Accuracy and Quality Assurance

AI systems can generate inaccurate or misleading information, sometimes referred to as "hallucinations".

Users must:

a) Verify all factual information.

b) Check references, quotations, and legal content.

c) Review all outputs before publication.

d) Exercise professional judgement at all times.

Responsibility for the content remains with the Council employee or councillor using the AI system.

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9. Procurement and Third-Party AI Systems

Before procuring or implementing any AI-enabled system, the Council shall undertake appropriate due diligence including:

a) Data protection assessment.

b) Cyber security review.

c) Transparency and explainability assessment.

d) Supplier assurance.

e) Legal compliance review.

f) Value for money assessment.

Contracts with suppliers should clearly define ownership, security, retention and use of Council data.

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10. Transparency to Residents

The Council is committed to maintaining public trust.

Where AI is used in delivering services, the Council will:

a) Be open about how and why it is used.

b) Explain the purpose of AI systems when requested.

c) Ensure residents retain access to human assistance.

d) Avoid creating barriers to accessing Council services.

e) Publish appropriate information regarding its use of AI.

Residents should not be required to interact solely with AI-powered systems.

10.1 Disclosure in Reports and Formal Documents

Where AI has materially contributed to a report, analysis, recommendation, consultation outcome or other formal Council document, the author should include a brief declaration describing the nature of the AI assistance.

Examples include:

a) Analysis of consultation responses.

b) Generation of policy options or recommendations.

c) Significant drafting of public-facing reports.

d) Summarisation of large volumes of information.

Routine administrative assistance does not normally require disclosure.

Suggested wording:

Artificial Intelligence Declaration

Artificial Intelligence (AI) was used to assist in the preparation of this document. All content, analysis, recommendations and conclusions have been reviewed and approved by the report author, who remains responsible for its accuracy and content.

Where AI contributed to analysis:

Artificial Intelligence Declaration

AI tools were used to assist with the analysis and summarisation of information contained within this report. All outputs were reviewed and validated by Council officers. The recommendations and conclusions presented remain those of the Council and have not been determined by AI.

10.2 Public Information

The Council will publish information on its website explaining how AI may be used to support service delivery, communications, administration and operational efficiency.

The information will make clear that:

a) AI supports staff and councillors rather than replacing human judgement.

b) Council officers remain accountable for decisions and communications.

c) Personal and confidential information will be protected in accordance with data protection legislation and Council policies.

d) Residents may request further information about the Council's use of AI.

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11. Training and Awareness

The Council will provide guidance and training to relevant staff and councillors on:

a) Responsible AI use.

b) Data protection obligations.

c) Information security requirements.

d) Identifying risks and limitations of AI.

e) Verification of AI-generated content.

Training requirements will be reviewed periodically as technology develops.

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12. Governance

Overall responsibility for this policy rests with the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk shall:

a) Monitor use of AI within the Council.

b) Review risks and opportunities.

c) Ensure compliance with legal obligations.

d) Maintain a register of approved AI applications.

e) Report significant AI-related risks to Council.

Major AI deployments affecting public services shall be reported to the Council before implementation.

13. Monitoring and Compliance

Failure to comply with this policy may result in:

a) Withdrawal of access to AI systems.

b) Investigation under the Council's disciplinary procedures.

c) Reporting of breaches where required by law.

Significant incidents involving personal data shall be managed in accordance with the Council's Data Breach procedures.

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14. Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually, or sooner if:

a) Legislation changes.

b) Regulatory guidance changes.

c) Significant new AI technologies are introduced.

d) Council operational requirements change.

Appendix A: Quick Rules for Staff and Councillors

You MAY:

✓ Use approved AI tools for drafting and administrative tasks.
✓ Use AI to assist with resident enquiries and correspondence.
✓ Use AI to assist research and summarise information.
✓ Improve document readability and accessibility.

You MUST:

✓ Check all AI-generated content.
✓ Protect confidential information.
✓ Use professional judgement.
✓ Comply with data protection requirements.
✓ Review and approve all AI-assisted correspondence before sending.

You MUST NOT:

✗ Input personal or confidential data into unapproved AI systems.
✗ Allow AI to make decisions on behalf of the Council.
✗ Publish AI-generated material without review.
✗ Use AI in a way that could mislead residents or colleagues.

APPENDIX B: AI Transparency Notice

AI Transparency Notice

Diss Town Council may use approved Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to assist with drafting correspondence, preparing documents, undertaking research and supporting administrative tasks. All communications and outputs are reviewed by Council officers, who remain responsible for the accuracy, content and decisions made on behalf of the Council.

Governance Note: The Council may choose to publish this statement on its website rather than include it in every email footer. This provides transparency while remaining proportionate where AI is used only as a drafting and productivity aid subject to human review.

APPENDIX C: Approved AI Applications Register

The Town Clerk shall maintain and periodically review a register of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications approved for Council use. The purpose of the register is to ensure that AI systems used for Council business have been appropriately considered from a data protection, information governance, security and operational perspective.

The register shall record:

- Name of the application.
- Supplier.
- Approved business use.
- Whether personal data may be processed.
- Any restrictions on use.
- Date approved.
- Approval authority.

Only applications included within the approved register may be used for Council business unless specific authorisation has been granted by the Town Clerk.

Applications may be approved where appropriate security, contractual, information governance and data protection safeguards are in place, and where the proposed use complies with the Council's legal obligations and internal policies.

Publicly available AI services may be used for general research, learning, drafting assistance and other non-confidential purposes, provided that no personal data, confidential Council information, commercially sensitive information, or information relating to residents, employees or councillors is entered into those systems. This does not prevent the use of AI tools; rather, it ensures that their use is proportionate, secure and compliant with the Council's information governance and data protection obligations