Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy

Approved by Organisational Change Board 8/12/25

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1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way local governments operate, offering opportunities to enhance service delivery, drive efficiencies, and increase citizen engagement. With rapid technological advances and growing expectations for responsive digital services, now is a critical moment for Oxford City Council ('the Council') to act. This strategy sets out our approach to harnessing AI's potential while ensuring ethical, transparent and responsible implementation.

What we mean by AI

AI describes computer systems which can perform tasks usually requiring human intelligence. This strategy concerns Generative AI, a class of technologies that produce new content in response to requests from users and are based on machine learning and using very large volumes of data. The Council's AI Policy provides a more detailed definition and examples.

2. Vision and Objectives

Oxford City Council's Strategy 2024-28 sets out our five strategic aims:

- Good, affordable homes
- Strong, fair economy
- Thriving Communities
- Zero Carbon Oxford
- A well-run council.

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AI is a powerful tool to help us achieve these goals – whether by improving how we engage with citizens, enhancing data-driven decision-making or enabling smarter, more efficient service delivery and better use of public funds. By analysing data intelligently, automating repetitive tasks and making information more accessible, AI can help staff respond to citizens' needs more quickly, personalise services, and allocate resources where they are most needed.

Our vision is to embed AI across the Council in a way that improves our citizen experience, enhances the capability of employees and helps us deliver smarter, sustainable services while maintaining ethical oversight and inclusive values. We aim to reach a point where:

- All staff are confident and capable in using AI tools safely and ethically to support routine tasks and data-led decision-making
- AI serves as an assistant, not a replacement – human oversight and accountability are always present
- The use of AI leads to improved services and more efficient use of public resources, while protecting the contributions of the workforce.

Objectives

1. AI literacy and collaboration

We will provide tailored workshops, training pathways and resources for staff to ensure all service areas are equipped to adopt and benefit from AI technologies.
We will work collaboratively, supporting cross-departmental learning and experimentation and engaging in wider networks, to develop new ideas and scalable solutions.

2. Safe, ethical and transparent implementation

We will maintain accountability and compliance with data protection laws, as outlined in the Oxford City Council AI Policy.
We will embed fairness, transparency and environmental responsibility into all AI initiatives, with clear governance to monitor impacts and mitigate risks.
We will apply AI where it adds genuine value, while preserving human contact, judgement and creative problem-solving in areas where these remain essential to delivering trusted and empathetic public services.
We will take a pragmatic approach to AI implementation, piloting use cases where feasible and assessing safety, ethics and value before investing in new technologies.

3. Improved service efficiency

We will deploy AI tools to streamline administrative tasks, reduce costs, and improve productivity, enabling better use of resources and quicker resolution of citizen queries.
We will use AI to support our broader 'digital first' initiatives, so we can prioritise our non-digital help for people with most need.
We will take an evidence-based approach to scaling up AI initiatives: establishing goals and business needs; monitoring results and Return on Investment (ROI); and managing the whole AI lifecycle.

4. Enhanced public engagement and citizen experience

Our Citizen Experience Strategy underlines our commitment to put citizens at the heart of service design and delivery. We will use AI-driven insights to better understand the needs of our citizens and to shape services that reflect the experiences of Oxford's diverse communities, incorporating consultation and feedback.
We will deploy AI-driven tools to simplify communication and personalise support across multiple channels.
We will ensure services using AI are accessible to all, including those without digital access and those who may be wary of AI, so that no-one is left behind.

5. Environmental sustainability

We will be mindful of the environmental impact of AI initiatives and provide training for all employees in using AI in energy-efficient ways that support our zero carbon goals.

6. Leveraging existing technologies and data

We will integrate AI with existing tools such as Power BI and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to optimise performance, enhance data analysis and improve data-led decision making.
We will ensure that key data sets are structured, accessible and maintained for quality to be AI-ready, enabling reliable and responsible use of AI across services.

3. Principles for AI Use

Oxford City Council will adhere to the following principles when implementing AI solutions:

3.1 Empowerment: AI should support staff in delivering safer, more efficient, and equitable services. Organisational change initiatives will ensure staff are engaged and supported through the transition.

3.2 Transparency and Public Trust: Transparent communication and clear messaging will be used to build and maintain public trust, including assurance of data being protected. Stakeholders will be clearly informed where AI has played a significant part in decision-making, with proactive communication to staff and citizens when they are interacting with AI, beyond updates to privacy statements.

3.3 Explainability: AI tools must be understandable by staff, and the Council must be able to explain how decisions are made.

3.4 Accountability: Human oversight will be maintained for all AI-enabled decisions, ensuring human control over and responsibility for AI outputs.

3.5 Data Security & Privacy: Compliance with UK GDPR and other relevant data protection policies, ensuring explainability, data minimisation, and the right to object to automated decision-making.

3.6 Inclusivity & Equity: AI should improve accessibility and equality in service delivery, supported by Equality Impact Assessments and audits to ensure fairness and mitigate for bias.

3.7 Sustainability: AI solutions should align with the Council's broader sustainability goals, with sustainability expertise included for procurement, process design and

implementation. This will support consideration of environmental impacts, including energy use, carbon and water footprint.

- **3.8** **Collaboration**: Ongoing engagement with the LGA AI network, Multiverse community, and other councils to support shared learning.
- **3.9** **Ethical Foundations**: AI deployment will be guided by established ethical frameworks, including the UK Government Office for AI's principles and LGA guidance.

4. Governance

A structured governance framework will oversee AI adoption across the Council:

- **4.1** **AI Policy & Ethical Guidelines**: An AI policy, to be reviewed annually, supplemented by a practical toolkit, will guide staff in using AI responsibly and sustainably.
- **4.2** **AI Steering Group**: A multi-disciplinary steering group will assess high-impact AI applications for compliance and ethical considerations. Its Terms of Reference will define membership (including Legal, ICT, data, sustainability, equalities, and service leads), meeting frequency (initially monthly), and responsibilities (such as reviewing high-risk applications, maintaining a risk register, signing off training programmes, conducting ethics assessments, overseeing communications, setting evaluation frameworks, monitoring progress on the action plan and setting escalation protocols). The steering group will be chaired by a senior officer and will explore the inclusion of external or lay voices to ensure appropriate challenge and independence. The AI Steering Group will report into the Organisational Change Board (OCB), providing regular updates and recommendations to support strategic oversight and alignment with organisational priorities.
- **4.3** **Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs)**: Required for all AI systems handling personal or sensitive data.
- **4.4** **Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs)**: Required where AI may affect accessibility, service delivery, or equality outcomes.
- **4.5** **Environmental Impact Assessments**: Required where AI may have a significant energy use or other environmental impact
- **4.6** **Procurement Standards**: All AI procurements must meet the Council's ethical and data standards and comply with guidance from the LGA.
- **4.7** **Monitoring and Evaluation**: A robust framework will be introduced to assess the success and impact of AI systems. This will include performance indicators, fairness metrics, environmental assessments, and mechanisms for incorporating citizen feedback.
- **4.8** **These governance arrangements will be reviewed** whenever necessary, and annually as a minimum, to adapt to the fast evolving external environment and changing opportunities and risks.
- **4.9** **This strategy will be formally reviewed and refreshed in December 2026**, with interim progress monitored by the Organisational Change Board through key milestones, governance updates, and feedback mechanisms such as the annual staff survey and service performance reports. The review will consider technological developments, regulatory changes, and organisational readiness.

5. Critical factors for success

5.1 Continued backing from senior leaders, elected members, and service heads to embed AI across the Council.

5.2 Clear messaging that AI supports – not replaces – the workforce.

5.3 Practical, tiered training (e.g. awareness for all staff; advanced use for analysts and planners).

5.4 Peer-led learning and shared pilots with partners (e.g. LGA, Multiverse).

5.5 Ensuring that there is testing and benchmarking of AI solutions to enable compliant and reliable deployment in high-impact, low-risk areas as well as enabling the testing of innovative new ideas.

5.6 Avoiding overreach into complex automation before governance structures are proven.

5.7 Operationalising the AI Steering Group and embedding DPIAs/EqIAs into early-stage thinking.

5.8 Transparent policies on explainability, data use, sustainability and human oversight.

5.9 Proactive engagement with unions and staff to build confidence.

5.10 Clear public communication to ensure trust and reduce AI-related anxieties.

5.11 Continued leverage of LGA networks, pilot consortiums, and neighbouring councils to share costs, lessons, and models.

Appendix A: Activities completed 2024-25

Our AI Steering Group was formed in early 2024. The table summarises progress to date against the six objectives of the strategy.

Objective	Progress to date
1. AI Literacy and collaboration	- Organisation-wide digital skills assessment conducted - Programme of digital skills training delivered at three levels, open to all employees - Programme of apprenticeships launched, with 50+ employees working towards qualifications in AI, data and business transformation - Work with Change Agents Network to develop and share Copilot guidance and use case examples
2. Safe, ethical and transparent implementation	- Pragmatic and evidence-informed approach to AI established, investing in skills, governance and trialling use cases - AI Steering Group established to collaborate on policies and guidance, oversee AI initiatives and mitigate risks 'Using AI at Work' policy, guidance and toolkit published - Apprenticeships programme (see objective 1)
3. Improved service efficiency	- Pilot of 56 Copilot Pro licences launched across service areas (36 for employees undertaking apprenticeships and 20 others) - Series of workshops delivered, examining potential Return On Investment (ROI) of use cases across 6 service areas
4. Enhanced public engagement and citizen experience	- Use case workshops delivered (see objective 3) - Health Check completed of the Contact Centre and Intent Call Analysis procured to advise on further AI opportunities.
5. Environmental sustainability	Pragmatic and evidence-informed approach to AI established, investing in skills, governance and trialling use cases
6. Leveraging existing technologies and data	- Citizen Contact Data Cleansing Options Report produced and recommendations approved. - Improved use of AI for creating, visualising, and analysing data sets for evidence and data-led decision making

Appendix B: Action Plan to December 2026

Objective	Actions	Lead	Timeframe
1. AI Literacy and collaboration	Continue to support the apprenticeship programme and collate use cases and learning	People Team	Dec '25 – Dec '26
	Deliver 'AI Bitesize' training for all staff	People Team	Jan – March '26
	Publish training recordings	Change Support Team	Nov '25 – March '26
	Update 'Using AI at Work' intranet guidance	Change Support Team	Nov '25 – Dec '26
	Support Change Agents to enthuse and guide colleagues	Change Support Team	Ongoing
	Deliver workshop(s) for Business Leads in all service areas, to explore transformative opportunities through AI	People Team	Nov '25
2. Safe, ethical and transparent implementation	Deliver 'AI Bitesize' sessions on safe and ethical use of AI	People Team	Nov '25 – March '26
	Share guidance and recording on safe and ethical use of AI	People Team	March '26
	Develop and implement a framework for assessing risk levels in new AI initiatives and testing safety, transparency, GDPR compliance, fairness and energy use before implementation	Change Support Team	March '26
	Develop and implement a framework for assessing, authorising and monitoring use of Copilot Agents	ICT	March '26
	Create and develop a live list of AI approved tools and a monitoring and audit process for AI supported systems and processes	ICT	March '26
	Incorporate AI safety and ethical use into GDPR training and guidance	Information Governance	March '26
3. Improved service	Deliver workshop for business leads (see objective 1)	People Team	Nov '25

Objective	Actions	Lead	Timeframe
efficiency	Provide business analysis support to ensure projects have clear goals and tools for measuring progress and ROI	Change Support Team	Ongoing
	Through apprenticeship cohort, monitor potential for ROI and service improvements, and identify where Copilot Pro licences will have greatest impact	People Team	March '26
	Keep a central record of projects and benefits, to enable scaling of high impact solutions	Change Support Team	Jan '26
	Engage with LGA AI Hub, Multiverse Community Forums and other local government networks to explore practical applications	ICT	Ongoing
	Engage with South East Employers AI Network to explore ethical considerations and practical applications	People Team	Ongoing
	Trial use of Copilot to streamline administration of job evaluation process	People Team	
	Engage with the business via Service Directors to ensure AI is embedded into service planning and delivers ROI	Change Support Team	Dec '25 and ongoing
4. **Enhanced public engagement and citizen experience**	Trial use of Copilot to streamline licensing and application queries and resolve more issues at first point of contact.	Customer Services	Dec '26
	Explore use of AI for analysis of public consultations	Planning	July '26
	Complete intent call analysis of the calls to the Contact Centre to understand where we can use AI to better respond and manage calls	Customer Services	April – June '26
5. **Environmental sustainability**	Cover energy efficiency in 'AI Bitesize' training	People Team	Nov '25 – March '26
	Cover energy efficiency in Business Leads workshops	People Team	Nov '25
	Establish framework for environmental impact assessments in new AI initiatives	Environmental Sustainability	

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Objective	Actions	Lead	Timeframe
6. Leveraging existing technologies and data	Expand Power BI dashboards with real-time data and exploit RPA and Power Platform integration	ICT	
	Implement data cleansing of citizen contact data to better enable uptake of digital solutions	Change Support Team	

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Implement data cleansing of citizen contact

Appendix C: Indicators for Success

		By
1	50 employees gain qualifications in AI, data or business transformation	Dec '26
2	Over 30% of employees in every service area actively use Copilot Chat	Dec '26
3	No significant data breaches or negative equality impacts	Ongoing
4	Case studies shared of successful implementation showcasing fairness, transparency and environmental responsibility	Dec '26
5	Use cases recorded and shared, identifying opportunities for ROI	Dec '26
6	Delivery of contribution to £200K savings target for financial year 2027-28	March '27
7	Environmental Impact Assessments completed	
8	Improved use of AI for creating, visualising, and analysing data sets for evidence and data-led decision making	