Place Services

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Ways of Working Guidance

Version 1.3 November 2026

Essex County Council

Place Services – Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Ways of Working Guidance

	Details
Purpose	Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be a useful tool. This policy sets out Place Services position on the use of AI tools in the workplace to ensure integrity, accountability, and professional standards are maintained.
Scope	This policy applies to everyone within Place Services.
Review	Place Services Management Team will review this policy on a monthly basis.
Updates	V3: revised 05/11/2026 V2: revised 30/07/2026 V1: issued 09/07/2026
Reviewed	05/11/2026

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be a useful tool. This policy sets out Place Services position on the use of AI tools in the workplace to ensure integrity, accountability, and our professional standards are maintained.

This information is provided supplementary to any wider Essex County Council policies. **All employees working for Place Services must work within the guidelines set out below.**

Individuals should also be compliant with the relevant AI policies and guidance for membership of their professional bodies.

This policy also applies to external consultants, sub-contractors, etc, working on behalf of Place Services.

This policy has been compiled with reference to the AI policies and guidance of the following organisations:

- CIfA - Chartered Institute for Archaeologist
- CIEEM - Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management
- CMI - Chartered Management Institute
- ECC - Essex County Council
- GOV.UK
- PINS - Planning Inspectorate
- RTPI - Royal Town Planning Institute

Should you have any queries regarding the use of AI at Place Services, please speak to the Head of Place Services, or the Natural, Historic or Built Environment Manager.

What we mean by ‘AI’

The ECC definition of artificial intelligence (AI) means any computer systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. This includes but is not limited to:

- **Traditional AI** that uses rules and algorithms to analyse data, spot patterns and make decisions for specific tasks, such as image recognition or virtual assistants like Siri - it’s good at identifying existing patterns but cannot create new content
- **Generative AI** such as Copilot that can create new content, such as text, images, audio or code – it's powerful but it also raises questions about accuracy, bias, and transparency
- **AI powered chatbots** that answer customer service questions
- **Robotic process automation** (RPA), which uses AI to automate repetitive and rule-based tasks typically performed by humans

The requirements of this policy and declaration of interests include, but are not strictly limited, to the use of generative AI and AI powered chatbots. However, it does not comprise traditional AI and machine learning or algorithmic equations, examples of which include:

- Spatial analyses undertaken in a Geographical Information System (e.g. Viewshed analysis of landscape visibility within a study area)
- Weighted algorithmic models used to undertake analysis of data (e.g. the Biodiversity Net Gain metric, which weights habitat type, condition, and location to calculate a score, or tree risk scoring methods)
- Rule-based document generation (e.g. mail-merge or scripts inserting Place Services data into a standard template).

Responsibility and Accountability

Place Services expect our employees to produce original content that is attributed to their authorship. All employees are required to:

- Undertake their own assessments, analysis, and professional judgement.
- Author all work themselves.
- Ensure the accuracy, legality, and quality of all documents produced.

The use of AI does not remove individual responsibility for work outcomes.

A 'golden rule' for any use of AI is that you must use AI responsibly. It is your responsibility to ensure that the information generated is accurate and appropriate.

Planning Context

Much of the work undertaken by employees at Place Services is within the planning sector - **any** planning applications/consultation response/evidence-based assessment etc. may end up at appeal/hearing/written reps/etc.

For this reason, we must adhere to the latest guidance on AI set out by the Planning Inspectorate: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/use-of-artificial-intelligence-in-casework-evidence

Professional Context

Place Services and many of the individuals within our team have accreditation with our specialism's professional bodies, either practice wide, or on an individual basis e.g. IHBC, CIEEM, LI etc. It is your responsibility to ensure that your use of AI is compliant with the AI usage policies and guidance of your professional body.

Acceptable AI Tools

Copilot Chat is the only AI tool approved for use by all Essex County Council employees, including Place Services. If you wish to use an alternative tool, please speak to the Head of Place Services, Natural, Historic or Built Environment Manager in the first instance.

Permitted Use of AI

It is recognised that AI is a valuable tool, when properly and transparently used, but AI should only be used for the following purposes:

- To refine your writing by assisting with grammar and spelling correction.
- As a search tool for research.
- Basic proof-reading for clarity, tone, formatting and structure.
- Presentation of visual content e.g. in a PowerPoint display, however, presentation must conform to brand guidelines.
- To tidy up or create notes from transcripts of internal Teams meetings.
- To help build spreadsheet formulas, macros, or scripts for automating repeatable tasks.

There will be other uses of AI, in addition to those above, that may be permitted, but these must be agreed in writing with the Head of Place Services or the Natural, Historic or Built Environment Manager.

Declaration

The following text must be included on all planning application response letters and correspondence:

> "Place Services have a policy relating to the use of AI. Unless otherwise stipulated, any AI use will be limited to basic proof-reading, grammar, and spelling correction. This response has been reviewed by the author(s). If you have any queries, please visit our website www.placeservices.co.uk."

The following text must be added to all work produced where AI has been used:

> "Declaration: An AI tool was used during the preparation of this [letter/report] in order to [XYZ]. The resulting text has been reviewed by the author(s), who take(s) full responsibility for the [letter/report's] content."

Text included on templates must not be deleted. All work includes but is not limited to, letters, reports, emails, technical summaries.

If you have any questions or need further guidance, speak to the Head of Place Services, Natural, Historic or Built Environment Manager.

Prohibited Use of AI

While AI tools can be a useful tool for the tasks noted, it should not be used to generate original content. Place Services employees **must not** use AI tools to:

- Generate images, reports, assessments, recommendations, or professional opinions.
- Draft or author documents or correspondence.
- Summarise and duplicate work of others.
- Complete assessments, evaluations, or decision-making tasks.
- Produce technical content.
- Replace professional judgement or original thinking.
- Enter confidential, personal or sensitive information into AI tools, see Section *Data Protection and Confidentiality*.
- Input commercially sensitive data and financial information into AI tools.

AI-generated content must not be presented as your own work outputs under any circumstances.

Some clients may prohibit the use of AI entirely, for example in technical reports or tender submissions.

You must check the 'AI Restrictions & Prohibitions Log', saved here:

Z:\PlaceServices\1_PracticeManagement\1_Admin\3_General_PS_Administration\13_PS Policies and Guides\AI Policy

….whether there are any client prohibitions on the use of AI before using it in work on their behalf.

If you have any doubt about whether your use of AI is compliant, speak to the Head of Place Services, Natural, Historic or Built Environment Manager.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

No confidential, personal or sensitive information must be entered into AI tools under any circumstances, in line with data protection and information security policies.

Impacts of AI Usage

For Place Services

Not following this policy, can:

- damage our reputation.
- make our systems and tools vulnerable to attacks and exploitation.
- create data breaches that expose confidential information.
- lead to fines and significant financial costs.
- interrupt the normal functioning of the council.
- cause harm to clients, applicants and others.

For you

Not following this policy could also have a negative impact on you because:

- if you don't follow the policy, it may be considered as breaking the council's code of conduct.
- in more serious situations, this could result in disciplinary action under the ECC disciplinary policy.

Compliance and Concerns

We understand that mistakes can happen. You or someone else might do something and later realise it is against this guidance. If this happens, talk to your Team Manager immediately and explain what has happened.

If you are concerned about how AI is being used or think it is being used in a way that is not in accordance with this guidance, report it immediately to your Team Manager, to help reduce the risk of harm.

Failure to follow this guidance may result in disciplinary action. Any breaches of this guidance will be reported to the ECC Information Governance team.

Please note that the Council has the right to monitor email, system usage and internet traffic. Audit trails will be retained.

Family members or friends should not be allowed to use ECC equipment or have access to ECC information. The account owner is accountable for any wrongdoing on their account.

Guidance Reviews

Due to the evolving capability and application of AI we will keep this guidance under continuous review.

Additional Links, Guidance and Learning Tools

ECC My Learning	My Learning: Learning Search
GOV.UK Training	Free AI training for all, as government and industry programme expands to provide 10 million workers with key AI skills by 2030 - GOV.UK
ECC AI Policy	Artificially intelligence (AI) policy
Planning Inspectorate	Use of artificial intelligence in casework evidence - GOV.UK
Government Digital Service	Guidelines and best practices for making government datasets ready for AI - GOV.UK
GOV.UK Ethics and Safety	Understanding artificial intelligence ethics and safety - GOV.UK