Public Protection Partnership | Bracknell Forest West Berkshire Wokingham

PPP AI AND DIGITAL STRATEGY
2026 - 2029

Contents

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Public Protection Partnership (PPP) is a shared service delivering environmental health, licensing and trading standards on behalf of two authorities (Partners), Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Council. It also shares a range of services with Wokingham Borough Council including trading standards, financial investigations, intelligence functions, animal health and welfare and case management work and the technical delivery of air quality monitoring and reporting.

The PPP is committed to protecting and supporting residents and legitimate business through the successful use of information and intelligence, delivering safe and healthy neighbourhoods through high-quality, efficient, and responsive services that safeguard our communities and uphold public trust.

In an era of rapid technological advancement, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital innovation present transformative opportunities to enhance how we operate, make decisions, and engage with the public.

This strategy sets out our vision for harnessing AI and digital technologies to enhance productivity, improve service delivery and support sustainable development. By embracing innovation, we aim to:

- Improve service delivery through automation and smarter ways of working. This could for example apply to the production of minutes, reports or presentations using AI technology or making use of digital technology to complete documentation during routine inspections.
- Enhance decision-making and priority setting by improving data analysis by helping the Service to utilise more effectively the large amounts of data that is collected already.
- Empower our workforce with tools that reduce administrative burden and enable staff to focus on complex, high-value tasks.
- Engage communities effectively by providing accessible, digital-first services that meet diverse needs. This could also include the production of documents or respond to queries from customers in their chosen language.

This strategy is intended as a permissive framework, enabling innovation rather than imposing restrictions, guiding the adoption and prioritisation of diverse AI tools and digital innovation and applications over the next three years.

Central to this approach is the commitment to aligning AI initiatives with the partner councils' broader objectives, including climate change commitments, ethical governance, and workforce development, while keeping residents firmly at the heart of our decision making.

Our approach to artificial intelligence and digital tools is firmly rooted in supporting and enhancing the work of the Service. These technologies will be used to streamline processes, reduce administrative burdens, and provide better insights, enhancing safety, enabling

colleagues to focus on the professional judgement, relationships and decision-making that only people can deliver.

By embedding AI and digital solutions as complementary tools, we aim to empower our workforce, improve service quality, and create more capacity while ensuring that human oversight, accountability and expertise remain at the heart of everything we do.

2. SCOPE

This strategy applies to all users of the PPP's IT systems and equipment, including full time, part time, casual and agency staff. It covers any AI tools and digital technology used for council work, whether on council provided devices or personal devices used for council work or research.

3. VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Digital tools will be used to improve efficiency, collaborative working with partners, accuracy and responsiveness across all our service areas. Technology should support, not replace, professional judgement. Digital solutions are designed to assist officers in their work by improving access to information, reducing manual administration and supporting informed decision-making. Professional expertise, statutory responsibilities and human oversight will always remain central. Technology should remove barriers, not create them, for our service users and must support equitable access for all communities.

All digital systems must comply with data protection legislation and partner authority policies and data must be, safely stored and shared only where lawful and necessary to protect the public. Systems should enable appropriate data sharing, with partner authorities and external partners to facilitate joined-up working.

The performance of certain investigatory functions within the PPP may require the surveillance of individuals. Where digital technology is used to undertake these functions it must be done in accordance with the West Berkshire Council Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) – Policy and Guidance. Digital technology, including operational tools such as body-worn cameras, should be deployed where it strengthens our ability to protect residents, our staff, businesses and the environment. These technologies must support efficient investigations, enhance officer safety, and improve the quality and reliability of the evidence we collect. Storage, retention and sharing of this data must be lawful, controlled and proportionate, ensuring the protection of privacy rights and evidential integrity.

Investments in technology should demonstrate clear public benefit, long-term sustainability and cost-effectiveness. We will prioritise solutions that reduce duplication, integrate with existing systems and deliver measurable improvements. The Partnership will embrace digital innovation where it is safe, appropriate and aligned with our regulatory duties. New tools will be assessed for risks, equalities impacts, operational implications and legal compliance before implementation.

AI has the potential to free officers from some repetitive and mundane tasks, free up time for more meaningful aspects of work, can make work safer and more accessible, and improve services delivered to the public but its use is not without risks which need to be factored into any decisions about the appropriateness of its use.

This strategy aims to ensure that the use of Artificial Intelligence within the Public Protection Partnership is ethical, transparent, and centred on the needs of residents, staff, members, partner organisations and the businesses that we serve. It brings together our commitments around responsible innovation, legal compliance, and workforce empowerment, and is grounded in five core principles.

1. Accountability and Oversight

The PPP will uphold strong governance and transparent decision-making for all AI systems. Clear lines of accountability and consistent human oversight will remain fundamental to ensure that AI supports rather than replaces professional judgement.

AI must be used ethically and in compliance with all applicable legislation, regulations, and partner organisational policies. Colleagues must not use AI to generate content that is discriminatory, offensive, or otherwise inappropriate. Where there is uncertainty about whether AI is suitable in a particular context, staff should seek guidance from their line manager, partner authority IT, legal or information management teams or the Service Lead for Public Protection as necessary.

2. Fairness, Transparency and Inclusivity

Where an AI system is using or collecting personal data, it will fall within the scope of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018). Users must be aware of how AI-generated outputs might impact people, as these tools can inherit social biases.

AI tools are not for example designed to recognise gender or ethnicity, so these factors should be considered when using generated content. West Berkshire Council's IT Service will, as the host authority, be consulted on any AI technology procured. Any use of AI must comply with West Berkshire Council's [ICT Policy](#), [Digital Strategy](#), [Data Protection Policies and Guidance](#) and [Access to Information Policy](#).

Content, including text and images, produced by AI tools should be identified and disclosed as containing GenAI-generated information to maintain transparency.

An example of the suggested text that could be used: *Note: this image/document contains content generated by Artificial Intelligence/ All AI generated content has been reviewed by the Council for accuracy and edited/revised where necessary*

3. Environmental Responsibility

The Service will prioritise environmentally sustainable AI solutions that minimise energy demand and carbon impact. Procurement and deployment decisions will be aligned with the

partner council's climate change commitments, ensuring that AI adoption supports long-term environmental goals as well as service improvement.

4. Resident and Stakeholder Engagement

Residents, partners, and stakeholders' perspectives will remain central to how AI is used, ensuring that decisions are grounded in community needs, expectations, and lived experiences.

5. Workforce Empowerment and Skills Development

AI will be used to empower and support the PPP's workforce, enhancing professional capability rather than replacing roles or undermining autonomy. Continuous training and development will be provided to build an AI-literate workforce capable of using technology responsibly and confidently.

4. RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF USING AI IN PUBLIC PROTECTION

While AI has the potential to improve services, it also brings important risks that must be carefully managed especially when used in areas that directly affect residents' safety, wellbeing and rights. The PPP is committed to understanding these risks and addressing them through responsible, transparent and ethical AI practices.

1. Automated Decision-Making and Impacts on Residents

When AI is involved in decisions that affect people particularly vulnerable residents any mistake or bias can have serious real-world consequences. Incorrect assessments, flawed predictions or inaccurate prioritisation could lead to inappropriate support, delays in services or unfair outcomes. Human oversight will therefore remain essential.

2. Inaccuracy and Bias

AI systems can generate incorrect or unreliable information. They can also reproduce or amplify biases found in the data they are trained on. This creates a risk of unfair or discriminatory outcomes, which is unacceptable in public services. Careful monitoring, testing and human review are necessary to ensure accuracy and fairness.

3. Lack of Transparency

Some AI tools operate in ways that are not easy to explain, making it difficult for staff or residents to understand how decisions or conclusions were reached. This lack of transparency can undermine trust and make it harder to challenge or review decisions. Public services must be able to explain how AI influences outcomes and maintain clear accountability.

4. Data Privacy and Security

AI often relies on large amounts of data, which in public protection may include sensitive personal information. This raises important questions about how data is stored, who can access it and how it is protected from misuse or breaches. Strong data governance and compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act are essential.

5. Impact on Service Quality and the Workforce

If not introduced carefully, AI could negatively affect service quality and staff wellbeing. Poorly implemented systems might increase workloads, reduce professional autonomy or create job insecurity. Staff must be supported with clear communication, good training and safeguards to ensure AI enhances rather than undermines their roles.

6. Ethical and Environmental Considerations

AI technology raises wider ethical and environmental concerns. Large-scale computing uses significant energy, contributing to environmental impact. There are also concerns about intellectual property, copyright, and the labour practices involved in developing AI systems. These issues must be recognised and considered when adopting any AI tool.

5. AI AND DIGITAL TOOLS

The Service is currently using or seeking to start using a number of AI Tools and Digital Technologies. These will be kept under constant review and will focus on harnessing emerging technologies to drive innovation, improve service delivery, and enhance operational efficiency across the Service where it is appropriate to do so.

Microsoft Co-Pilot

The Service already makes wide use of this technology which can help with a wide range of tasks including writing, rewriting and editing draft emails, reports and strategies using different tones which are audience appropriate and also for summarising long documents.

It can be used for information retrieval to extract key information from documents and email threads. It can be used to analyse datasets and highlight trends, build charts, graphs, and pivot tables and create formulas or automate calculations. Officers can use it to create slide decks and rewrite or simplify slide content, draft or refine policies, strategies and assist with report writing. It can and is also used to generate drafts of press releases, magazine articles and resident's newsletter items.

It does not however replace professional judgement or decision-making, must always be fact checked and care should be taken when creating confidential or restricted content.

LEXISNEXIS AI TECHNOLOGY

The Service has been trialling the use of LexisNexis Protégé which is designed to help legal teams work more efficiently while maintaining high professional standards. It can be used to draft legal documents, summarise information and carry out research albeit that all work is always reviewed and finalised by our Officers.

TABLETS AND TECHNOLOGY

The Service is submitting a business case to seek provision of additional tablets and mobile printers in order to allow teams including the Licensing Service to be able to access our cloud based systems remotely to be able to check information, complete forms and issue documentation while out and about in the community.

THE HOUSING APPLICATION

The Service has submitted a business case for a housing app to be used on existing mobile phones. It is a property inspection collection form. Inspectors complete the information on the app on their phone when they visit a property and are able to add in relevant photographs etc to produce a report with accurate property details on a room-by-room basis. The app uses AI summaries to speed up production of schedule of works that can be sent to landlords.

If a hazard is identified during the inspection the dashboard categorises all relevant findings to facilitate scoring by the inspector. This will speed up the report production, ensure records contain up to date information and save officer time. It also enables officers to report easily on the number of category 1 and 2 hazards found. This should result in improved information storage and more efficient inspection and hazard assessments.

BODY WORN CAMERAS

The Service is also trailing use of a body worn camera. Enforcement officers are increasingly using body-worn cameras (BWCs) as a digital tool to enhance staff safety, reduce aggressive behaviour, and capture high-quality, real-time evidence during regulatory investigations. By acting as a visible deterrent and providing accurate, robust footage, BWCs support more efficient documentation of incidents and strengthen the evidential basis for enforcement action.

Their use is governed by strict data protection and privacy requirements, including the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, ensuring footage is handled securely, stored on encrypted systems, and retained only for defined periods. Officers deploy BWCs during site visits, inspections, and interactions with individuals suspected of offences, following best-practice guidance to inform the public when recording. As with policing BWCs have become an essential digital asset, supporting safer working environments and more effective regulatory compliance.

AI MINUTE

West Berkshire Council has been rolling out the use of AI Minute which provides a secure and efficient way to capture, transcribe and summarise meeting discussions, helping officers focus fully on the conversation rather than on taking notes. The PPP will start to trial the use of this technology for internal meetings and potentially to assist with interviews in investigations where it is appropriate to do so.

The tool uses advanced speech-to-text technology and large language models to produce accurate, structured minutes and action logs, significantly reducing the time spent on administrative follow-up. Early government testing has shown that Minute can save around an hour of admin for every hour-long meeting, freeing staff to concentrate on higher-value work and improving the consistency and quality of official records

6. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

To deliver the Service's priorities effectively, we must ensure that our workforce has the right skills, confidence and capability. This includes continuing to invest in the development of our existing staff, so they are equipped to meet new and emerging demands.

As part of this commitment, the Training and Development Plan sets out the need to actively explore opportunities to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other digital tools into our daily work. This may include improvements to processes, policy development, decision-making or wider service transformation.

The Service will therefore continue to strengthen digital skills and encourage a culture of innovation. This includes ongoing engagement with emerging technologies such as AI to ensure staff can use these tools safely, responsibly and in ways that improve outcomes for our residents and communities.

7. GOVERNANCE

Corporate governance and oversight are vital in an AI Strategy because they provide the structure, accountability and safeguards needed to deploy AI responsibly. Strong governance ensures that decisions about AI are transparent, risk-aware and aligned with organisational priorities, public expectations and regulatory requirements. It creates clear roles and responsibilities, ensuring that AI tools support ethical standards, data protection duties, equality obligations and service integrity. Effective oversight also helps monitor performance, manage risks such as bias or misuse, and ensure that AI systems remain accurate, secure and fit for purpose throughout their lifecycle. Ultimately, governance ensures that AI delivers real value to staff and citizens while maintaining trust, fairness and accountability.

Bracknell Forest Council adopted its AI Strategy in 2024 which includes the governance arrangements for this area of work. The PPP will make use of these governance arrangements while the corporate approach in West Berkshire (as the host authority for the PPP) is being developed. Any procurement of technology will however be undertaken in conjunction with the West Berkshire Council IT Team.

AI implementation will be governed by Bracknell Forest Council's Information Management Group (IMG), chaired by the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) and including the Caldicott Guardian and Data Protection Officer (DPO). This group, will oversee all ethical, legal, and security aspects of AI deployment. The IMG will regularly monitor and review AI applications to ensure compliance with data protection standards.

8. POLICY REVIEW

The pace of development and application of AI tools and digital technology is such that this strategy will be in a constant state of development. Therefore, this policy needs to be treated as a living document. It will however be subjected to an annual review by the Joint Management Board. The strategy will be subjected to a formal review by Members of the Joint Public Protection Committee at the March 2029 meeting.