

Action Plan for Clerks Navigating AI-Driven Power Shifts in Town & Parish Councils

This 'action plan' is designed to offer short practical tips that you can pick and choose from; no-one can do it all at once but it will help get things moving.

1. Strengthen Governance and Transparency

- Establish clear policy on how AI tools may be used in council work.
- Require councillors and officers to declare when AI has been used to draft any written word
- Publish simplified summaries of complex documents (budgets, planning reports) so everyone can access the same baseline information.
- Develop a local decision-tracker so residents can see how and why decisions were made.

2. Level the Information Playing Field

- Provide councillors with equal access to appropriate AI tools to prevent technological advantage becoming a new power base.
- Offer short training sessions so all members and staff, regardless of party or experience, can use AI confidently.
- Create a shared public space where officers upload key policies, templates, and guidance that AI tools can reference. This ensures documents used are both genuine and up to date

3. Protect Integrity

- Develop a code of conduct for AI use during consultation actions to prevent misuse or manipulation.
- Encourage councillors and staff to verify AI-generated claims before using them in council and personal/professional communications.
- Work to ensure that AI-assisted communications from councillors and staff remain factual, non-misleading, and aligned with council standards.

4. Support Officers in Managing Increased Scrutiny

- Prepare officers for more detailed questions and scrutiny from councillors and residents who now have AI-generated insights.
- Build internal capacity to respond quickly and accurately to requests for clarification and consider publicising those requests in the same manner as FOI requests

- Train officers in the tools and actions necessary to identify when AI outputs are incorrect, biased, or incomplete.

5. Help to Redefine the Role of Councillors

- Encourage councillors to shift from being “holders of knowledge” to facilitators of collaborative decision-making.
- Promote skills such as collaboration, communication, and ethical judgement as these are currently areas where AI can struggle to replace human leadership.
- Support chairs and committee leads in managing more informed and potentially longer debates with increasing numbers of councillors wishing to contribute

6. Manage Party Dynamics and Manifesto Pressures

- Continue to provide neutral briefings to all political groups so no party gains an unfair advantage through selective access to information.
- Encourage parties and individuals to use AI for evidence-based policy development rather than adversarial tactics.
- Keep a watching brief for AI-generated misinformation or exaggerated claims during local campaigning and be ready to appropriately intervene to protect the Council.

7. Empower Residents Without Overloading the System

- Offer residents guides to using AI to understand planning, budgeting, and council processes to improve their understanding.
- Provide clear communication links for residents to ask questions so officers can manage the increased flow of AI-triggered enquiries.
- Use AI to analyse consultation responses, but ensure officers review and interpret the findings.

8. Build Ethical and Responsible AI Practices

- Adopt a simple AI ethics framework covering fairness, transparency, accountability, and data protection.
- Ensure AI tools used by the council comply with UK data protection laws.
- Be aware of AI output bias, especially in planning, enforcement, or community engagement contexts.

9. Strengthen Organisational Resilience

- Avoid over-reliance on any single AI platform; maintain human oversight at all stages.
- Train multiple officers in AI-related tasks to prevent knowledge bottlenecks.
- Develop contingency plans for AI outages or incorrect decision making based on AI outputs.

10. Foster a Culture of Continuous Learning

- Encourage councillors and officers to treat AI as a tool for improvement, not a threat.
- Consider holding community based workshops to share best practices and emerging risks.
- Review the council's AI approach annually to keep pace with technological change.