

Limits on AI use? County Council confronts the challenge

13 October 2026



Surrey councillors and officers could soon be barred from using online AI tools such as Gemini and ChatGPT under new rules around the burgeoning tech's use.

A Surrey County Council AI policy has been put forward, which aims to set out when it is appropriate and inappropriate to use artificial intelligence for council business.

The draft document, which was reviewed by a council committee ahead of final approval, demands that AI users must only utilise approved tools and softwares for council business.

Gemini and ChatGPT are explicitly listed as examples of tools accessed directly via the internet – which would not be permitted under the new regulations.

The new policy comes following a motion from October 2025 that called on Surrey County Council to present an AI policy in response to the technology's rapidly growing use.

While guidance on its use already existed for the council's members and officers, this is the authority's first formal policy on the matter.

Other inappropriate uses of AI listed include using it to make decisions that affect people "without human oversight" and generating false or misleading information.

It also prohibits the use of AI that results in discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics, breaching data protection or unlawfully accessing sensitive information.

The policy says: "Where AI is used for general business purposes, users must use Microsoft Copilot Chat or Copilot 365 (or other SCC-authorised tools) rather than consumer tools such as Gemini or ChatGPT, due to data-security concerns.

"Approved tools have been risk-assessed and have existing SCC guardrails and oversight."

The council instead says assistance with "routine administrative tasks" is an example of where AI can be used within the rules – such as summarising reports and scheduling meetings.

It also says the tech can be used to generate meeting minutes so long as they are clearly labelled as AI-assisted.

Summarising public consultation responses and improving workflow efficiency are also on the list of approved uses.

Breaches of the rules set out in this policy would be treated as misconduct, according to the document, which could result in disciplinary action for employees or other contractual consequences for agency workers and contractors.

Surrey County Council's resources and performance select committee put forward recommendations around the policy – including that it be shared with the future West and East Surrey council, which will take over responsibility in April 2027.

The recommendations also called for strengthening the policy around training for the tech's use and considering AI's environmental impact.

If adopted, the policy would be reviewed on an annual basis – or sooner if required, such as if it needed to be brought in line with any prospective national laws or regulations.

Last October's motion, proposed by Councillor Jonathan Essex (Green Party: Redhill East) called for transparency about where AI is used and for awareness as to the energy and environmental impact of the technology.

"The energy use and wider environmental footprint associated with server farm capacity used by AI is significant," the motion reads.

The policy is expected to be discussed and finalised by Surrey County Council's cabinet following the committee's recommendations.

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter