

Audit, Governance & Standards Committee

Thursday, 23rd
October, 2025

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Gemma Monaco (Chair), Councillor Chris Holz (Vice-Chair) and Councillors James Fardoe, Andrew Fry, Rita Rogers, Gary Slim and Paul Wren

Officers:

Debra Goodall and Nicola Cummings

Democratic Services Officers:

Mat Sliwinski

29. CYBER SECURITY UPDATE (INCLUDING WHATSAPP AND AI POLICY)

The report concerning the proposed Council's staff policies on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Acceptable Use and WhatsApp Use was presented to the Committee.

It was explained that the purpose of developing the AI Acceptable Use Policy was to ensure the ethical, transparent, and responsible use of AI technologies across the Council. The draft Policy as set out in Appendix 2 to the report covered key principles that the Council and its employees would need to adhere to when utilising AI technologies. These principles covered:

- Transparency and Accountability – All AI tools used must be registered in the Council's Information Asset Register. Any automated decision-making must comply with UK GDPR and include human oversight.
- Data Protection and Confidentiality – No personal or confidential information should be input into public AI tools. Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) were required for AI processing of personal data.

Chair

Audit, Governance & Standards Committee

Thursday, 23rd October, 2025

- Procurement and Third-Party Use – AI use must be declared in procurement processes. Contracts must prohibit unauthorised AI use. Only approved AI tools may be used within the Council.
- Ethical Use and Bias Mitigation – AI must not be used to generate discriminatory or offensive content. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) were required with use of AI to ensure fairness.
- Training and Oversight – Council staff must receive training on responsible AI use. AI-generated content must be reviewed and clearly disclosed.

The WhatsApp Policy at Appendix 3 was developed to guide Council staff as to appropriate use of WhatsApp for Council-related communication. The main aspects of this policy were:

- Permitted Use – If utilised, WhatsApp may only be used by staff for non-sensitive, logistical communication (e.g. meeting times, location changes).
- Prohibited Use – WhatsApp must not be used for customer communication or sharing of personal/confidential data (e.g. personal data, internal decisions).
- Security and Compliance – WhatsApp was deemed not secure for sensitive data by the Council. Any use of WhatsApp by staff on personal devices may be subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.
- Photos and Media – Images of people required consent and staff must exercise caution when sharing photos to ensure photos did not contain sensitive information in the background.
- Emergency Use: WhatsApp may be used for emergency alerts (e.g. civil emergencies) under strict guidelines.

Following the Officer presentation, there was a detailed discussion of the following matters by Members:

Audit, Governance & Standards Committee

Thursday, 23rd October, 2025

- It was clarified that both the AI Acceptable Use and WhatsApp policies presented were new policies which, subject to approval by the Executive Committee, would become formal policy documents for the Council. It was noted that these policies had been created in line with best practice examples from other authorities.
- Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services explained that the use of AI tools by the Council were currently limited to basic processes such as to assist with presentations and document summaries. It was reiterated that the Council exercised caution with the phasing in of use of AI and the AI Acceptable Use policy was designed to provide guidelines for use of this technology across the Council.
- The potential risk of AI in recruitment was highlighted including the increasing prevalence of applicants utilising AI tools to fill out job applications. In this regard, some Members commented on the importance of reviewing recruitment practices by the Council's human resources (HR) department to ensure the quality of candidates was being verified at an early stage of recruitment processes.
- A Member requested that the WhatsApp Policy be updated with a clearer definition and outline of what constituted sensitive and non-sensitive messages together with hypothetical examples of such messages.
- Members requested that the report for this item together with the appendices (AI Acceptable Use Policy and WhatsApp Policy) be circulated to all elected members.
- A Member asked that consideration be given to producing specific AI Acceptable Use and WhatsApp policies for Councillors or expanding the policy documents included in the report to be expanded to cover both the Council's Members and Officers.
- Members expressed the view that training on AI was essential requirement for Councillors. As such it was requested that the arrangements for provision of AI training for elected members be considered at the next meeting of Member Support Steering Group.

Audit, Governance & Standards Committee

Thursday, 23rd October, 2025

- It was commented that the notes of the Corporate Cyber Security Group at Appendix 1 did not provide any additional information and should be removed from the updated version of this report.

The Committee endorsed recommendations 2) and 3) as printed in the report that the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Acceptable Use Policy and WhatsApp Policy be adopted as formal policy documents of the Council.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Executive adopts the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Acceptable Use Policy (Appendix 2) as a formal policy document.**
- 2) The Executive adopts the WhatsApp Policy (Appendix 3) as a formal policy document.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.55 pm