

Our Ref: NG/RM/26013
Date: 28th January 2026

Nicola Griffiths
Deputy Director of Governance
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust
Lawton House
Bellringer Road
Trentham
ST4 8HH

Reception: 0300 123 1535

Dear

Freedom of Information Act Request

I am writing in response to your e-mail of the 12th January 2026. Your request has been processed using the Trust's procedures for the disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

Requested information:

I am submitting an FOI request seeking to understand how public bodies are exploring or applying Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support service delivery. These questions are intended to gather insights into current practice, governance, and future planning. They should not be interpreted as critical; we are simply researching how public services are approaching emerging technologies.

Please provide answers to the following:

AI Use in Operations

- Does your organisation currently use any form of Artificial Intelligence (AI) or automated systems in its operations? **Yes**
 - If yes, please list the tools or systems in use and provide a brief description of their purpose (e.g., administrative support, triage, analytics, chatbot services, etc.).
Microsoft Copilot
 - If not, please state whether your organisation has explored or piloted any AI-based technologies in the past 3 years. **N/A**

AI for Decision-Making

- Does your organisation use AI or algorithmic systems to support or inform decision-making in any area (e.g., resource allocation, risk assessments, case prioritisation)?
No
 - If yes, please describe the type of decision-making supported and the nature of the AI's role (e.g., advisory, automated assessment, automated decision). **N/A**
 - Please also confirm whether human oversight is applied. **N/A**

AI Chatbots and Customer Interaction

- Does your organisation currently use chatbots or virtual assistants—AI-driven or rules-based—to support public enquiries or internal staff functions? **No**
 - If yes, please specify their purpose, whether they are AI-based, and when they were implemented. **N/A**

Policies and Governance

4. Does your organisation have any formal policy, strategy, or guidance relating to the use of Artificial Intelligence or automated decision-making? **Please see Appendices 1 and 2 attached. Policy is in development.**
 - If yes, please supply a copy or provide a link.
 - If not, please indicate whether such a policy is in development.

Data Protection and Ethics

5. If AI systems are used, what measures or frameworks does your organisation have in place to ensure:
 - Compliance with data protection and privacy obligations
 - Transparency for service users
 - Ethical or responsible use
 - (For example, DPIAs, algorithmic impact assessments, ethical guidelines—if applicable.)

The DPIA process has a comprehensive coverage for the use of AI.

Trials, Pilots, or Future Plans

6. Has your organisation run any pilots, trials, or exploratory projects involving AI in the last 3 years, or does it plan to do so in the next 12–24 months? **Yes**
 - If yes, please provide brief details of the purpose, timeline, and status of these initiatives. **All trials have been Copilot related and they are all ad-hoc rather than formally documented.**

Staff Training and Awareness

7. Does your organisation provide any training, guidance, or internal communications to staff relating to AI, its use, or its implications? **Yes**
 - If yes, please describe the type of training or include documents if available. **Please see Appendices 1 and 2 attached.**

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review of the management of your request. Internal review requests should be submitted within two months of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to: Dr Buki Adeyemo, Chief Executive, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare Trust, Trust Headquarters, Lawton House, Bellringer Road, Trentham, ST4 8HH. If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Griffiths
Deputy Director of Governance

Guidance on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

Background

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the development of systems that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence. This includes tasks like writing reports, making recommendations, processing data, problem-solving, language understanding, and decision-making.

The purpose of this guide is to support the safe, fair, ethical, and legally compliant use of AI tools, ensuring that data protection laws are upheld. AI is a rapidly evolving field, and this guidance will be updated as necessary to reflect changes in the technology.

Registering to Use AI Tools

You are permitted to register for popular AI tools, such as Google Gemini and ChatGPT, using your @combined work email address for **work purposes** only. However, you **MUST**:

- Use a password **different from** your work device login credentials.
- Adhere to all data protection and security policies as outlined below and in Trust Policies.

Acceptable Uses of AI Tools

Staff are allowed to use AI tools such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Microsoft AI services for the following purposes:

- Composing non-confidential emails.
- Drafting reports or creating summaries of existing documents.
- Automating routine administrative tasks, such as generating meeting notes or formatting documents.
- Summarising non-confidential research or extracting key points from long articles.

Important Restrictions:

- **Do not input confidential data** into any AI tools. This includes patient information, staff personal details, and sensitive commercial data.

- The use of **Microsoft AI Tools** is allowed as long as they are not used to query or review patient or commercial data. You may use these tools to summarise non-confidential meeting transcripts, provided the outputs are checked for accuracy and include the disclaimer: *"These minutes were created through the use of AI."*
- **Microsoft Edge Co-Pilot** can be used to summarise web pages and articles but **MUST NOT** be used within browser-accessed clinical or care systems.

If you encounter a blocked or restricted AI tool, please contact the Information Governance (IG) team for advice on secure alternatives or obtaining necessary permissions.

Clinical Decision-Making and AI

AI tools can be useful in supporting clinical decision-making, but they should not replace your professional judgment. The final decisions about patient care must always be made in conjunction with the patient or service user, based on your clinical expertise.

AI outputs can assist with analysis, but you are responsible for ensuring that any AI-generated content aligns with clinical best practices and is thoroughly verified before being applied.

Risks and Responsibilities in Using AI

AI systems, particularly those operating on public networks like OpenAI's ChatGPT, **are not secure**. Data entered into these systems may be retained for training or used in responses to other users. Therefore:

- **Never input confidential or sensitive information** into AI tools. This includes patient records, staff personal data, financial details, or proprietary business information.
- **You are responsible for the accuracy** of AI-generated content. Always verify and cross-check AI outputs for factual correctness before using them.
- AI systems may introduce **bias** into their outputs. When reviewing AI-generated responses, consider the potential for bias, particularly regarding race, gender, or other sensitive characteristics, and ensure fairness in decision-making.

Failing to comply with these guidelines or exposing confidential data to AI platforms may result in disciplinary action and legal consequences under data protection laws.

- **Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA):** Before implementing any new AI tool or application, a **DPIA must be conducted** to assess the potential impact on individuals' privacy and identify any risks. Contact the Information Governance (IG) team for support in completing this assessment.
- **Legal Basis and Transparency:** Clearly communicate the **legal basis** for any data used in AI processing and maintain **transparency** with patients and staff. Inform them about how their data may be used by AI tools, especially if patient information is involved, even in a de-identified format.
- **Accuracy Documentation:** AI-generated outputs are **predictive, not factual**. All outputs used in decision-making must be documented and **verified for accuracy** by staff before being applied.
- **Data Minimisation and Alternatives:** Use only essential data in AI tools. Where possible, utilise **de-identified or synthetic data** rather than personal information to minimise risk, especially in research contexts.

Approval for Using AI Tools

Due to the rapidly evolving nature of AI, these guidelines cannot cover every possible use case. If you are uncertain whether a specific use of AI falls within this guidance, you must consult the Information Governance (IG) team at IG@combined.nhs.uk.

Before using an AI tool for purposes outside of this document's scope, obtain approval by providing a detailed case for review. The IG team will assess potential risks and ensure compliance with data protection laws and organisational policies.

Ethical Use of AI

When using AI tools, consider the following ethical guidelines:

- **Transparency:** If AI tools are used to generate documentation or emails, make it clear to your colleagues by informing them that AI was involved in the creation process.
- **Appropriateness:** Not all tasks are suitable for AI. Consider the context and ensure that AI is only used when it adds value without compromising human oversight.
- **Accuracy:** AI can sometimes produce incorrect, incomplete, or misleading information. Always double-check the content for factual accuracy, ensure clarity to prevent misunderstandings, and maintain the organisation's standards of professionalism.

Final Reminders:

- **AI is a tool, not a replacement for human judgment.** It should assist, not substitute, your expertise and discretion in both clinical and non-clinical tasks.
- Always **consider the limitations** of AI, including its potential for error, bias, and misunderstanding.
- **Never input patient, staff, or sensitive commercial information** into AI tools.

For any questions or concerns regarding AI use, please contact the Information Governance Team at IG@combined.nhs.uk.

Privacy Notice – Use of Artificial Intelligence

This privacy notice gives you information on how we protect your personal data when using Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools. This includes software applications that incorporate AI technologies.

The National Cyber Security Centre has defined AI as: *'Any computer system that can perform tasks usually requiring human intelligence. This could include visual perception, text generation, speech recognition or translation between languages'*.

Our contact details

Name: North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust
Address: Lawton House, Bellringer Road, Trentham Stoke-on-Trent ST4 8HH
General phone number: 0300 123 1535
Website: www.combined.nhs.uk

We are the controller for your data. A controller decides on why and how data is used and shared.

Data Protection Officer contact details

Our Data Protection Officer is responsible for monitoring our compliance with data protection requirements. You can contact them with queries or concerns relating to the use of your personal data at DPO@combined.nhs.uk.

Our Use of AI Tools

The use of AI is the biggest and fastest moving change to computing in recent years. It is a new technology that requires careful governance to ensure its use is safe and does not expose personal data about our service users and staff to unnecessary risk. Examples of its use include:

- Generation of business meeting notes and any action points
- Generation of summaries of multi-disciplinary team meetings where our service users and patients cases are discussed

Governance of AI

We are aware of the risks when using AI. It is totally dependent upon development and training so, we must be mindful of some key risks:

- It can get things wrong and present incorrect statements as facts (a flaw known as 'AI hallucination')
- It can be biased and is often gullible when responding to leading questions
- It can be coaxed into creating toxic content as it is prone to 'prompt injection attacks'
- It can be corrupted by manipulating the data used to train the model (a technique known as 'data poisoning')

Before their use is approved, AI Tools are subject to enhanced Data Protection Impact Assessments for the specific use case requested. These are considered by the Deputy Chief Digital Information Officer to decide if they are fit for use.

We see AI as a tool to support our work. However, ownership and accountability will always remain with our staff members who use and double check the product generated by AI, eg the accuracy of a clinical note.



Chair: Janet Dawson
Chief Executive: Dr Buki Adeyemo
www.combined.nhs.uk
Follow us on Twitter/X: @CombinedNHS
Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/NorthStaffsCombined



We are a diverse and inclusive Trust and there is no place in our organisation for discrimination, harassment or personal abuse

We have internal policies and training in place to ensure that our staff adhere to the highest standards of confidentiality.

Only authorised personnel will have access to confidential information.

Lawful Basis

The lawful basis to process your personal data does not change because we use AI: This notice is in addition to our standard Privacy Notices which can be viewed on our website: [Privacy and GDPR - North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare Trust](#)

Which AI Tools will we use?

We are starting to use Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) such as Microsoft Co-Pilot and ChatGPT. These AI Tools can be standalone products or can be embedded into other services. They give us the ability to create human-like text and context and answer questions in a conversational manner.

They are used to simplify processes to improve the efficiency, quality and speed of our business processes so valuable clinical staff time can be better used in delivering patient care. As time progresses, we will expand the use of AI but each use case will be subject to the same high level of scrutiny.

For further information contact:

Data Protection Officer

North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare
NHS Trust

Lawton House

Bellringer Road

Trentham

Stoke-on-Trent ST4 8HH

Email: DPO@combined.nhs.uk

Information Commissioner

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 01625 545745

<https://ico.org.uk/>