Use of generative AI tools

By West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council has embraced generative AI, **developing custom in-house tools tailored to meet their unique needs**. By leveraging existing expertise within the council and using openly available large language models, they have crafted cost-effective and flexible solutions that integrate seamlessly with their workflows and data infrastructure. This approach ensures that the council retains control over its systems while addressing specific challenges.

The council initially focused on automating the creation of job advertisements and LinkedIn posts to accelerate recruitment processes. Using OpenAI's GPT models, a prototype was developed to generate content based on predefined inputs such as job titles, salaries, and reporting lines. The system collects this data through an integrated digital platform and feeds it into the AI model to produce complete job adverts. Feedback from senior managers rated the AI-generated content highly, averaging 8 out of 10 in satisfaction.

Building on this success, the council began exploring additional applications of generative AI, including the creation of bespoke AI 'assistants'. These assistants are trained with specific documents and prompts to address targeted needs. Examples include chatbots designed to answer frequently asked recycling questions and internal policy assistants aimed at helping employees quickly access accurate policy information.

8 OUT OF 10

FEEDBACK FROM SENIOR MANAGERS RATED THE AI-GENERATED CONTENT HIGHLY, AVERAGING 8 OUT OF 10 IN SATISFACTION.

During the initial stages, the council encountered reliability issues with ChatGPT and raised concerns about data privacy and OpenAI's data usage practices. Additionally, the recycling chatbot sometimes provided incorrect information due to limitations in its knowledge base.

To overcome these challenges, the council adopted OpenAI's secure APIs, which offer improved data protection and reliability. Publicly available data, such as existing job advertisements, was used to minimise privacy risks. AI models were fine-tuned with specific training data to improve accuracy and ensure consistency in outputs. Legal compliance was ensured through data privacy impact assessments and rigorous checks.

Collaboration and inclusivity were key to the project's success. Recruiting managers were actively involved in testing and refining the AI-generated job adverts, ensuring they met the council's standards and requirements. This inclusive approach reinforced trust in the system and demonstrated the council's commitment to ethical AI implementation.

The implementation of generative AI has delivered tangible benefits for West Berkshire Council:

Efficiency gains: Managers reported significant time savings in drafting job postings. The automation ensures that all essential information is included, resulting in consistently formatted adverts.

Cost-effectiveness: The initial setup cost was approximately £300 in staff time, with ongoing operational costs as low as £2 per month. This demonstrates that custom AI solutions can be far more affordable than commercial alternatives.

Improved accessibility: Internal policy assistants simplify access to information, enhancing communication and efficiency within the council.

Scalability: The council's ability to train AI assistants for diverse purposes highlights the adaptability of their approach.

West Berkshire Council is committed to expanding its generative AI initiatives. **Planned developments include**:

- Creating additional AI tools to streamline processes across a wider range of services.
- Expanding the internal policy assistant chatbot to cover more areas, providing employees with greater support.
- Exploring commercial AI products like Microsoft's Copilot and Amazon Bedrock to complement their in-house tools.
- Establishing a dedicated AI Governance Board comprising representatives from key departments, including ICT, legal, and frontline services, to oversee ethical AI deployment and ensure alignment with organisational goals.

See more: 'Using AI to improve local services – with people always in control'