

THE MJ Starfish

Talent 20 – Customer Experience and Digital

The requirements and expectations of residents have never been higher; with a 24/7 economy, the information revolution, and instant access to so many goods and services, there is pressure on local authorities to keep pace with technology and offer communities what they need, when they need it.

Working with local authorities across the country, Starfish Search has compiled a list of 20 officers who are at the forefront of these changes. In partnership with their colleagues and communities, these 'rising stars' are transforming services using cutting edge digital technology – improving outcomes and changing mindsets.

James Biddlestone Head of People and Transformation Mansfield District Council

James leads Mansfield's Innovation and Transformation programme. He has provided the strategic leadership of Mansfield's digital transformation journey, embedding the council wide implementation of a new highly accessible website, digital service forms and the creation of in-house developed galaxy websites for Mansfield's Theatre and Museum. James' leadership of the digital transformation journey has led to increased efficiency and productivity, improved customer experience and lower operational costs.



Lisa Blackburn Customer Experience Manager Barnsley Council

Lisa is responsible for the corporate Contact Centre and Digital Team at Barnsley and has been instrumental in reshaping the Council's approach to customer contact. Her Contact Centre improvement programme has already delivered impressive results – not just in performance targets, but through a culture shift embracing compassionate leadership and a one team approach. Lisa's commitment and passion is making a huge impact and inspiring others to put the customer at the heart of everything the service delivers.



Abigail Cole Digital Programme Lead, Robotic Process Automation London Borough of Redbridge

Abbi leads on Robotic Process Automation at Redbridge and is responsible for the development and delivery of automation to increase in-house capabilities. She plays a critical role in shaping and moving the council's digital ambitions forward and achieving cultural change. Utilising automation, Abbi is helping the council protect the accommodation standards of Redbridge's tenants. By reducing repetitive manual entry work, teams are empowered to focus on residents. Abbi's programme has captured the attention of *The MJ*, Smarter Working Live, LGC and Digital Leaders and is seen as an exemplar of good practice.



Rima Desai Assistant Director – Customer, Modernisation & Performance Insight Brighton & Hove City Council

Rima leads on Brighton & Hove's customer experience and digital modernisation programmes. The customer experience strategy is progressing well, providing more online services which link in with all key council IT systems. Working closely with service managers and technical



experts, Rima leads on the customer element on four core products: the council's website; MyAccount, the single online entry point for residents; the council's customer index database; and contact management which is transforming the handling of customer contact and form submissions.

Jodi Ezekiel Digital Improvement and Web Development Team Leader Wealden District Council

Jodi is leading Wealden's digital improvement initiatives, helping the council understand customers' needs and behaviours in order to shape services. Having previously headed up a large customer services team, it is no surprise that Jodi is passionate about finding innovative ways to learn from customers and has introduced a toolbox of digital improvement methodologies to deliver five star customer services. Jodi is described as an inspirational leader to a very talented web development team and she also coordinates an active group of digital champions from across the organisation to encourage digital improvements.



Haley Hudson Customer Service & Digital Strategy Manager North Tyneside Council

Haley leads an ambitious customer service programme at North Tyneside Council, focused on improving the customer experience as well as working with partners to deliver frontline customer services. Haley was instrumental in the pandemic recovery plans for both the council and the borough and has ensured that learning from the pandemic has informed the future North Tyneside customer service programme. The programme is at the heart of building a better North Tyneside. Haley's drive and vision has brought the programme to life for colleagues, residents, partners and elected members.



Natasha Hayes Head of Communities Norfolk County Council

Natasha has been the driving force behind the creation of the Norfolk Vulnerability Hub (NVH). The NVH is a powerapps based system, created to support and shield vulnerable residents during the pandemic. Her passion for partnership solutions across local government, the voluntary sector and health has seen the system developed to address wider support needs such as hardship, hospital discharge and Homes for Ukraine. Fully focused on the needs of the community, Natasha has harnessed the power of technology to enable the council to share support requests, create a single view of customers' needs and develop a powerful intelligence base to help shape future services.



Hannah Heinemann Head of Commercial and Programme Management Hambleton District Council

Hannah leads a high performing customer services and ICT team which is delivering excellent digital experiences for businesses and residents. The service ensured swift access to business grants and the energy rebate scheme and Hambleton was one of the few local authorities in the region to provide hybrid public meetings during the transition from Covid lockdown to face to face meetings. Hannah also oversaw the Campus@Northallerton collaboration with the University of Sunderland and York College. This is the first higher education facility in Hambleton, and is digitally enabled to allow for remote and in person learning to increase accessibility for students.



Naomi Hutchinson Chief Innovation and Growth Officer Sunderland City Council

Naomi recently joined the Smart City team from Sunderland Software City, where she found her passion for supporting tech start-ups and SMEs across the region through innovative digital solutions. Naomi has worked across a wide range of manufacturing and creative industries, honing her knowledge of how tech and innovation can boost business competitiveness and efficiency. Naomi embodies the city's ethos to leave no one and nowhere behind, and she is helping businesses across Sunderland understand how to take advantage of next generation connectivity to compete and grow.



Karen Johnston Head of Communications Bury Council

Karen joined Bury in 2019 to lead communications, marketing and engagement and quickly assumed responsibility for customer services. Her focus is on transforming the customer journey by maximising automation and self-service. She is currently leading an ambitious and innovative redesign programme to create a new operating model to deliver outstanding customer services. Her work



underpins the council's wider transformation programme to improve quality and reduce costs.

Fil Kamps Centre of Excellence Lead and Senior Innovation Engineer Kent County Council

Fil's enthusiasm and passion for digital innovation and transformation has helped Kent County Council move towards their ambition to become a 'digital first' authority. Fil leads a committed and talented team delivering digital solutions across the business with a particular focus on automation and efficiency. Fil's impressive project and programme management skills and technical expertise is playing a key role in delivering better services to Kent's residents.



Kay O'Flaherty Head of Service Digital Wrexham County Borough Council

Kay has recently joined the council to lead their digital programme. For Kay, digital is far more than just technology; it is about the collaborative and user-centric approach that can be achieved if used thoughtfully. Kay is passionate about the importance of access and inclusion and aware of the risks of customer isolation when replacing traditional channels with digital services. Kay is looking forward to supporting Wrexham with implementing new ways of working that puts the customer experience at the centre of the service.



Sam Starling Acting Data and Business Intelligence Lead Wiltshire Council

Using her background in teaching and passion for learning, Sam is on a mission to upskill Wiltshire. Her goal is to deliver an innovative and user-centric data capability for all, fostering a culture of evidence-based decision making to best serve Wiltshire's residents. She is excited by the opportunities created by Wiltshire's approach to data



science and determined to ensure data underpins the council's transformation programmes.

Nat Stevens Resident Services Involvement Manager Southwark Council

Nat works for Southwark's Housing and Modernisation department. His imaginative approach to customer services is best exemplified by the way he dealt with complaints of anti-social behaviour from one group of residents about another group. Recognising that a lack of awareness and understanding of each other's communities lay at the heart of complaints, Nat brought residents together, through community events and crucially through active participation in sport, especially football for children. For Nat, customer care is the catalyst for true community cohesion and understanding.



Pamela Stuart Registration Development Team Leader and Chief Registrar Dumfries and Galloway Council

Pamela's passion, drive and enthusiasm as Chief Registrar has played a key role transforming registration services and enhancing the customer experience across Dumfries and Galloway. Pam was recognised for her work to deliver a rapid transformation programme to ensure continued service delivery during the pandemic, implementing remote registration services, a single point of contact hub, online payments and a new digital process to handle the unprecedented volume of customer contacts. The success of the programme was evidenced in the seamless continuity of service delivery, enabling Dumfries and Galloway to facilitate 20% of Scotland's marriages and civil partnerships last year.



Jovanna Sobhee
Business Analysis Manager, Digital
Services
London Borough of Haringey
Jo not only leads the business analysis



function for Haringey, she has also helped create a new resident staff network, tapping into colleagues' experiences of council services to ensure that Haringey's digital offer is considerate of the borough's diverse communities. Jo is instrumental in ensuring the customer's point of view is front and centre; she is committed to the elimination of digital exclusion and leads her team to do the same. Jo also uses her influence to inspire staff networks and forums to share her approach and she is a true ambassador for diversity and inclusion across the workforce and embraces new perspectives with open arms.

Ed Strangeways Communications Business Partner – Web & Digital Cambridgeshire County Council / Peterborough City Council

Ed's leadership has overseen an ambitious programme to change the conversation around adults' care needs. The programme used behavioural science and a user centred approach to help residents access tech solutions and advice to help them live independent and healthy lives. Ed and his team responded with determination to the challenges of Covid, while continuing to improve the user experience. Their work was recognised with a second place in the Monsido review of the Top UK Council Websites and second place for Top Websites for Accessibility in 2021.



Rizwan Tariq Head of Citizen Services Bristol City Council

Rizwan has played a key leadership role in transforming Bristol City Council's contact centre and face to face meeting spaces since 2016. The service has won a number of awards from the South West Contact Centre Forum, including Best Use of Technology, Customer Representative of the Year and Best Improvement Strategy. Working with colleagues across the organisation, Rizwan is now leading the development of the council's Channel Shift / Digital First Strategy which will reduce operating costs and enable council resources to be focused on those citizens that need them most.



Lucy Unsworth Programme Manager – Support Services Halton Borough Council

Lucy has a wealth of experience in Project Management and Customer Services and has recently gained a Green Belt in Lean Six Sigma Business Management. In Halton, Lucy and her colleagues are exploring how to maximise the use of technology from front to back office across all council services. They are determined to ensure the needs and access requirements of the more vulnerable members of the community are met while supporting the council's efficiency plans.



Sheraz Yaqub Head of Online Service Delivery & Product Owner, Customer Programme Birmingham City Council

Sheraz is leading Birmingham's customer service strategy, ensuring the council achieves high standards of customer experience across all online and offline contact channels spanning 1,200 services. His passion for customer services and digital is felt across the organisation and he is focused on getting the basics right as well as seeking opportunities for innovation. Sheraz is described as a unique talent and recognised for bringing excellent technical and strategic knowledge alongside a determination to find digital solutions for residents and the council.



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