

# Top Talent: Arts, Culture and Heritage

Meet the rising stars of local government leading the charge in championing arts, culture, and heritage within their communities. In this seventh Top Talent feature, we celebrate those who are delivering innovative initiatives and revitalising local culture scenes, preserving heritage, and fostering creativity. Explore how these dedicated individuals are shaping vibrant, culturally rich landscapes, and driving positive change at a grassroots level.

**Georgina Ascroft**  
**Museum and Gallery Manager**  
**Hartlepool Borough Council**



Georgina joined Hartlepool Council as the Museum and Gallery Manager in 2021. She has led her team in establishing an innovative, engaging and accessible programme in the museum and art gallery, reaching out to communities to ensure they are at the heart of what they do. She is passionate about her role and is currently leading the transformation of the Art Galley and Museum of Hartlepool. Georgina is an inspirational leader and advocates for her sector admirably.

**Semeta Bloomfield**  
**Community Commissioning Lead**  
**Watford Borough Council**



Since being promoted to Community Commissioning Lead at Watford Borough Council, Semeta's strong interpersonal skills have helped strengthen the relationships between the council and partners within the community and voluntary sector. She has spearheaded initiatives that have removed barriers, built trust and a sense of belonging for underrepresented communities. Semeta is committed to making arts and culture accessible for all and has been instrumental in shaping Watford's emerging Public Art strategy. Semeta has also led on several digital transformation initiatives across the organisation.

**Robbie Bratchell**  
**Corporate Events Manager**  
**Stevenage Borough Council**



Robbie manages many of the council's corporate events, including the annual Stevenage Day, Fairlands Valley Fireworks Display and Remembrance Sunday. He ensures the smooth running of these events, the success of which have grown year on year with over 70,000 people attending annually. With a passion for sports and leisure, Robbie began his career as an apprentice before being promoted to Sport and Leisure Officer to further develop the council's sports development programmes. Now Corporate Events Manager, Robbie has been instrumental in growing the events programme across the town and supporting the wider leisure and cultural delivery programme.

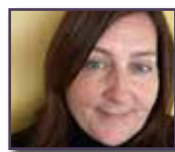
**Lewis Church**  
**Arts Development Officer**  
**Brighton & Hove City Council**



Lewis supports arts and culture across Brighton & Hove, working with arts organisations and networks, grassroots music venues and freelance creatives. He supported the Music Venues Alliance Brighton on several high-profile campaigns, whilst also working with property developers to bring more than £375,000 of public art to the city over the last twelve months. His

priority is mobilising collaboration and fundraising opportunities to preserve the character and identity of Brighton & Hove as a creative hub.

**Rachel Foster**  
**Head of Communities, Culture and Libraries**  
**Cheshire West and Chester Council**



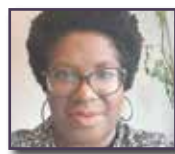
Rachel leads a great team, that has increased the profile of arts, culture and libraries, delivered investment and builds collaboration across the borough. Rachel has led transformation in Cheshire West and Chester both through physical developments and through inspiring cultural change and collaboration. Rachel's work aspires to reflect the role that culture, museums, arts, archives and libraries play in connecting and inspiring communities, shaping and making places, enhancing the economy and inspiring people. Chester's award winning Storyhouse is a true reflection of this ambition, the power of working through partnership, and real collaboration to deliver transformation.

**Andrea Francis**  
**Cultural Development Manager and Arts by the Sea festival Director**  
**BCP Council**



Andrea leads a small but incredibly dedicated team delivering cultural projects across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, including Bournemouth's flagship cultural festival – Arts by the Sea, the Historic England funded Poole High Street Heritage Action Zone Cultural Programme, and the Levelling Up Fund Public Art and Cultural Trails Project. Andrea is passionate about the benefits culture brings to people's lives, their communities, to the economy and local town centre regeneration. She drives change through developing strategy, building strong partnerships and providing opportunities for everyone to engage in cultural activity.

**Aretha George**  
**Acting Head of Culture**  
**Hounslow Council**



Aretha is strategic lead for culture in Hounslow and continues to work in partnership with stakeholders to create an offer for the borough that is diverse, inclusive and accessible. Aretha has led on capital projects for Hounslow's historic houses and led the design and delivery of a successful Summer of Culture programme which has now become a regular feature in the annual calendar. Her leadership, experience and flexible approach, enables Aretha to support London and national agendas, enrol others in the value of culture and see new opportunities and possibilities for culture and placemaking.

**Kevin Hadfield**  
**Head of Culture and Information Services**  
**East Riding of Yorkshire Council**



Kevin started as a Physical Training Instructor in the RAF before entering local Government



and has since led leisure and cultural services at various Local Authorities and Trusts, gaining numerous national awards. Kevin's dynamic leadership approach is the driving force behind East Riding's Libraries National Portfolio Organisation and developing the cultural agenda within East Riding at significant pace. Kevin is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of residents and sees the cultural agenda as a vehicle for success, making a difference both locally and nationally.

**Phil Hargreaves**  
**Head of Creative Programmes**  
**Bradford Council**



Phil joined Bradford at the start of its journey to implement a new 10-year cultural strategy, 'Culture is Our Plan', and had a pivotal role in its successful bid to be UK City of Culture 2025. Phil continues to play a leading role in developing Bradford's Cultural Sector, developing major partnerships with key national funders and bringing local, national and international talent as part of its programme of annual festivals and events. Phil is an advocate for the potential of culture and art to make a significant positive impact on local communities, which will be his primary aim during 2025.

**Anthony Hopkins**  
**Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service**  
**Merton Council**



Anthony has more than 25 years' experience working in public libraries and is Past President of London Libraries, the Libraries Connected region for London. As a trustee of Libraries Connected, he is leading a review of e-licensing practices. Merton is renowned for having one of the most cost-efficient library services in England while achieving some of the highest levels of customer satisfaction and usage. Anthony recently managed Merton's successful London Borough of Culture Cultural Impact Award application and manages the borough's adult learning and heritage services.

**Clare Hubery**  
**Leisure and Cultural Services Manager**  
**Norwich City Council**



Clare is a natural when it comes to working collaboratively with partners to deliver cultural and creative opportunities, supporting the cultural economy and driving positive opportunities for everyone who lives, works and visits the city. Clare is leading on a key aspect of the £25m Town Deal project to transform The Halls, a Grade 1 scheduled ancient monument, into an ambitious, multi-form venue which is inclusive, fit-for-purpose and sustainable. The Halls will be a

flagship placemaking venue for the city and a catalyst for cultural ambition.

**Peter Hughes**  
**Service Lead – Culture and Events**  
**Wigan Council**



Peter leads the Culture and Events teams at Wigan Council and has been involved in the delivery of the borough's Haigh Hall project. Historic Haigh Hall has benefited from £20m Levelling Up and £3.7m National Lottery Heritage funding and Peter has been instrumental in the first phases of developing Haigh Hall into a cultural visitor destination of national significance with world class facilities. The project is due to complete in 2027 and is progressing at pace.

**Helen Johnson**  
**Project Manager**  
**East Suffolk Council**



Helen has driven policy change through the Lowestoft Cultural Strategy (*Living on the Edge*), which was the blueprint for a new district wide Cultural Strategy, as well as using culture as part of place making initiatives and securing public investment to bring buildings back into use. Helen has successfully delivered programmes in partnership with neighbouring authorities, overseen two Heritage Actions Zones, and is now delivering a heritage restoration project as part of a £60m investment, which will create transformational change in the district.

**Rachel Lappin**  
**Anne Lister Programme Co-ordinator**  
**Calderdale Council**



From Brighouse to Brisbane, Rachel's talent and passion for promoting the legacy of Halifax's famous daughter, Anne Lister, is bringing thousands of visitors to Calderdale from across the world. Rachel's creative approach to event management, social media, partnership working and in-person engagement is showcasing Anne's remarkable contribution to local heritage and LGBTQ+ history, maximising Calderdale's place on the map as a cultural destination, and propelling the economic and social impact of Sally Wainwright's Gentleman Jack TV series. Rachel is a valuable member of the team championing local creativity through Calderdale's showstopping Year of Culture 2024, CultureDale.

**Zsuzsi Lindsay**  
**Cultural Placemaking Officer**  
**Reading Council**



Zsuzsi is passionate about championing arts and culture, demonstrating its value

and giving voice to underrepresented communities. She leads the Reading Cultural Education Partnership (CEP), a network of 50 cross sector organisations. Zsuzsi has a strong track record in raising significant funds for projects with social impact outcomes for young people, demonstrating the importance of access to creativity for young people's mental wellbeing, skills development and long-term positive outcomes. Zsuzsi is also member of the Executive for the Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association and is their lead for equality, diversity, and inclusion.

**Brian Mihayo**  
**Head of Libraries Culture & Creativity**  
**Haringey Council**



Brian has co-designed refurbishment projects with residents, transforming local libraries into vibrant community hubs. His persuasive vision, out-of-the-box thinking, and collaborative approach help to engage internal and external stakeholders. Brian successfully collaborated with Alexandra Palace to secure trust and foundation funding for a major project supporting young people to design and organise diverse cultural events and innovative programmes across Haringey's libraries, including concerts, comedy nights, and spoken word performances. His unwavering commitment to nurturing and empowering staff ensures that community needs are met with creativity and dedication.

**Holly Morgenroth**  
**Collections Officer, Royal Albert Memorial Museum**  
**Exeter City Council**



Holly is a curator at Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum, managing a team of assistant curators. She is responsible for research, display and interpretation of the collection including developing inspiring temporary exhibitions. She also ensures that information about RAMM's collections is available online. Holly's dedication to her job is evident - from acquiring one of the first beavers released back into the wild to gaining designated status for RAMM's collection of molluscs. She is passionate about the way museums can help inspire people to shape a better future.

**Harry Scott**  
**Seafront Arts Programme Officer**  
**Portsmouth City Council**



Harry took on the role of Seafront Arts Programme Officer in 2023, leading on the creative enhancements to 4.5km of promenades and public spaces under redevelopment on Southsea seafront. Harry set to work building an ambitious programme of public art and engagement activity, providing opportunities for local

artists and attracting established artists with a national profile. Harry is well connected with the local arts community and has brought a wealth of experience to the role, having previously managed Hotwalls Studios, the council's development of affordable workspaces for artists and makers.

**Rebecca Tomlin**  
**Economic Development Manager**  
**Harborough District Council**



Rebecca is a seasoned advocate for local development since 2013, with six years dedicated to Harborough District Council. She's championing the delivery of £2.8m in UKSPF & REPF funds, leading on two town centre master plans and driving a new economic development strategy. She is responsible for a number of sectors including tourism, culture, business support, inward investment, skills and employment. Her passion lies in empowering the business community, making economic benefits accessible to all. Rebecca's friendly approach and dedication makes her a trusted ally for businesses, ensuring growth and prosperity.

**James Trowsdale**  
**Strategic Lead for Culture**  
**North East Lincolnshire Council**



James became Strategic Culture lead for the council in 2020 and has firmly established heritage and culture at the heart of the Council's ambitious regeneration plans. Working closely with a diverse range of partners, he has enabled a sixfold increase in Heritage Fund investment in the borough and enabled significant growth of Arts Council England projects. This has been achieved through developing a culture of collaboration and partnership, empowering creatives and heritage practitioners to maximise their potential through programmes such as Our Future Starts Here, Paint the Town Proud and Edible Grimsby.

**Kath Wynne-Hague**  
**Head of Culture, Place and City Centre**  
**Hull City Council**



Kath has led a process of transformation of the council's Culture, Place and City Centre agenda. She has improved its relationships and partnerships, and raised the ambition in terms of the new cultural strategy, a potential UNESCO Creative Designation bid for the city, and a co-ordinated bid to Arts Council England under the place partnership scheme via the Local Cultural Education Partnership, 'Generation Hull', focusing on children and young people. Kath has also helped to secure UKSPF investment for creative and music industry networks and is leading the work to develop a plan to grow the film and TV sector in the city.

**Karen Yates**  
**Senior General Manager**  
**Sefton Council**



Karen Joined Sefton Council last year to lead on the curation and implementation of Salt and Tar, a brand-new events venue in the centre of Bootle with the task to change perceptions and lead on the cultural regeneration of the town. Karen has continued to transform Salt and Tar by bringing in several events due to take place this year including Tom Jones and Status Quo! Karen has led on creating meaningful partnerships with the local community and creating a culture led regeneration model that is unique and continues to grow.

**Leadership journeys, expertly navigated.**

When it comes to creating leadership teams who will change our world for the better, the best course to steer is not necessarily the most obvious. We don't shy away from difficult conversations or less predictable choices; we tell it how it is and we recruit across a range of sectors to access diverse talent.

[www.starfishsearch.com](http://www.starfishsearch.com)  
[penny.ransley@starfishsearch.com](mailto:penny.ransley@starfishsearch.com)  
[luke.judd@starfishsearch.com](mailto:luke.judd@starfishsearch.com)  
[sunita.patel@starfishsearch.com](mailto:sunita.patel@starfishsearch.com)

